PLAYS OF TO-DAY & TO-MORROW

THIS GENERATION

S. M. FOX

Plays of To-day and To-morrow

DON. By RUDOLF BESIER.

"Mr. Besier is a man who can see and think for himself, and construct as setting for the result of that activity a form of his own. The construction of 'Don' is as daring as it is original."—Mr. Max Beerbohm in *The Saturday Review.*

"It is a fresh and moving story . . . and full of good things."—Mr. A. B. Walkley in *The Times.*

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"'The Earth' must conquer every one by its buoyant irony, its pungent delineations, and not least by its rich stores of simple and wholesome moral feeling."—*The Pall Mall Gazette.*

LADY PATRICIA. By RUDOLF BESIER.

"One of the most delightful productions which the stage has shown us in recent years. Mr. Besier's work would 'read' deliciously; it is literary, it is witty, it is remarkable. . . . 'Lady Patricia' is much more than merely a success of laughter. It is also a success of literature. It is difficult, if not impossible, to convey the delicate feeling for words, the quaint, satirical quizzing of Mr. Besier of the *précieuse*, the dabblers in sentiment, the *poseurs* who form the people of his play."—*The Standard.*

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(A Play in Three Acts) and **THE CLODHOPPER**
(An Incredible Comedy). By S. M. FOX.

"I am inclined to think that we shall hear a great deal of Mr. Fox—supposing that Mr. Fox writes other plays as clever as 'The Waters of Bitterness,' and supposing that managers think the public clever enough to appreciate them. Anyhow his is a strong and bold début."—Mr. Max Beerbohm in *The Saturday Review.*

THE LOWER DEPTHS. By MAXIM GORKY. Translated by LAURENCE IRVING.

"As a picture of character and life it is profoundly and enthrallingly interesting."—*The Pall Mall Gazette.*

"Maxim Gorky's group of vivid studies of the submerged tenth of Russian society, which he presents in the form of drama, offers features of absorbing interest to the student of human nature."—*The Globe.*

TURANDOT, PRINCESS OF CHINA.
A Chinoiserie in Three Acts. By KARL VOLLMOELLER. Translated by JETHRO BITHELL.

THIS GENERATION

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A PLAY

BY

S. M. FOX

Author of "The Waters of Bitterness," etc.

NEW YORK: DUFFIELD & COMPANY

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TO

H. J. R. F.

F. M. F.

AND

C. S F.

2083135

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

George Tremayne	Of Tremayne & Son, Cigarette Manufacturers
Mr. Harburn	Of Harburn & Co., Financiers
Mr. Baxter, L.C.C.	A Journalist
Charlie Dickinson	A Sculptor
Tom Gwotkin	
A Young Clergyman	
A Committee Man	
Two Workmen	
Lucy Tremayne	
Clara Harburn	Lucy's Sister
Mrs. Baxter	
Laura Jevans	George's Sister
Matilda	
Harold and Millie	Tremayne's Children

Servants. Workmen and their Wives. A few "West End People." Performers, etc.

THE FIRST ACT

TREMAYNE'S HOUSE IN HOLLAND PARK
(Six months elapse)

THE SECOND ACT

TREMAYNE'S LITTLE NEWSAGENT'S SHOP, NOTTING HILL
(Six months elapse)

THE THIRD ACT

A WORKING MAN'S CLUB, FULHAM
(Three months elapse)

THE FOURTH ACT

MRS. TREMAYNE'S HOUSE, SOUTH KENSINGTON

THE FIRST ACT

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE :—*The comfortable smoking-room of* TREMAYNE'S *house in Holland Park—tastefully and very artistically furnished. The pictures (Medici Society prints, and so on) are few in number. The fireplace and door are on the right. Two windows on the left. There are folding-doors at the back which are thrown open as the curtain rises to admit* TREMAYNE, BAXTER, *and* DICKINSON. *A dinner-table spread with dessert is seen.*

GEORGE TREMAYNE *is a good-looking man about thirty-five. Ardent and enthusiastic for the welfare of others, he has long suffered from a sense of the inconsistency of his position—for he is at the same time a prosperous manufacturer and a whole-hearted Socialist. He is filled with pity for those who suffer. There is something of Tolstoi's idealism in his nature. And his views grow more uncompromising and unworldly as the need of a new life for all men presses upon him.*

BAXTER *is forty—sharp, practical, able. He is on the staff of a Radical newspaper, "The Daily Phone," and a member of the L.C.C. He carefully calls himself a Progressive, in preference to Socialist, because he holds that at the present moment advanced Radicalism is the more practical policy. He is a Fabian, and believes in evolutionary politics.*

DICKINSON *is a sculptor, twenty-five, and young for that. He has a certain charm of face and manner which is very attractive. Burning with fires of scorn at the hideous mess of our civilization, he overflows with artistic socialism. So greedy for universal health and joy and beauty, he takes no thought of means, and is proud to be called unpractical and flighty. But at present he is too light-hearted to wonder if he is merely "beating in the void his luminous wings in vain."*

GEORGE.

Let's come in here! The wife is a bit old-fashioned. She doesn't like smoke in the dining-room. (*He closes the doors and hands a silver cigar-box.*) Have a cigar? (BAXTER *shakes his head.*) Oh, I remember—you don't smoke!

BAXTER.

Poison !

DICKINSON.

One must have a little poison in life to keep one sweet ! I'll have a cigarette !

GEORGE.

(*Handing box.*) Don't be alarmed—they're not ours ! I'll have a pipe. (*Picks his up and begins to fill it.*) Now we're all suited—let's sit down. (*He and* BAXTER *drop into comfortable chairs.* DICKINSON *stands, back to the fire.*)

BAXTER.

I always say your chairs give you away, George —they're so opulent ! If you make us too comfortable, we shall stay too long.

GEORGE.

We won't keep the ladies many minutes. The fact is, I want to have a talk to you two. I've something to tell you.

BAXTER.

Quite like the opening of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.*

DICKINSON.

(*Playfully.*) Don't say that when he's got the good fortune to have the first still. (*To* TREMAYNE.) I beg your pardon . . . !

GEORGE.

Well! it's like in a way. For I've asked you here to-night to break a piece of news to you both (*a maidservant enters and hands the coffee*) —in a minute.

BAXTER.

I hope it's good news.

GEORGE.

The best!

BAXTER.

Then you're not going to join the Syndicalist lot?

GEORGE.

No. I don't hold with revolutionary methods. I believe in brotherly kindness—and graduated taxation——

BAXTER.

You're right! More scientific—and far more effective! You can worm in a screw where you can't drive a nail.

DICKINSON.

(*Who has been wandering round and is now looking at a statuette.*) I wish you'd got a Rodin, George. If you will stink of money you couldn't spend it better. Get one of those small marble groups—you know! Two figures flowing together like the ripples of the tide. (*He takes his coffee.*)

GEORGE.

I'm not sure what my wife would say.

DICKINSON.

Educate her!

GEORGE.

My dear Dickey! If you were married you'd know that was easier said than done.

(*The maid departs.*)

BAXTER.

Now for it.

GEORGE.

(*Bursting out.*) I can't afford Rodins! I can't afford anything! I've burnt my boats! I've given up business! I'm almost a pauper!

DICKINSON.

Splendid!

BAXTER.

So you're really going to face the music and chuck the Golden Calf. I've done you an injustice, George. I always thought you were one of those chaps who say "Capital must be fought by Capital." They mean their own, of course, and the bigger the weapon the better. They make the excuse that we're in a transitional period.

I don't say they're conscious hypocrites, but they're utterly inconsistent. They damn the cause.

GEORGE.

We're all inconsistent—more or less. I'm giving up business on consicentious grounds, but I'm keeping back a hundred a year.

DICKINSON.

I should make it two, old chap, while I had the chance. In this transitional period, you know, one really does need two.

GEORGE.

It's mostly on Lucy's account.

DICKINSON.

Then I should make it four!

GEORGE.

I'm afraid she won't like the change.

BAXTER.

Of course she won't. No woman likes poverty unless she's one of us. Even then it's difficult to get her to swallow it voluntarily—without a grimace. (*Ironically.*) They've got such a lot of common sense.

GEORGE.

(*Warmly.*) Lucy's awfully unselfish and loyal

to me. I shall talk her round. She'll back me up. But I haven't told her yet. So please don't breathe a word of this to-night.

BAXTER.

No, no!

DICKINSON.

Of course not!

DICKINSON.

(*Throwing himself into a chair.*) What converted you?

GEORGE.

(*Hotly.*) The horrible deceit of it all! You must trick and lie—it's the custom of the trade! You must lie and trick and undersell—it's legitimate competition. Here am I, not only a capitalist preaching Socialism, but a man growing rich by undermining the health of the rising generation. Our cigarettes are dirt cheap—mostly paper. They're the favourite smoke for boys; and in spite of the Act, we sell more than ever. We force them on the public. We must force them on the public with horrid, lying, full-page advertisements in the daily papers. You know them! Well, that's business—the quick-to-be-rich soul of modern business. I've struggled against my conscience for months—for years—and I can't make my life a living lie any longer.

BAXTER.

What do your partners say?

GEORGE.

Delighted! They'll have my share in future. I was a bit of a check on them. They regarded me as an obstructive—a crank. And now they'll be able to run the concern on purely up-to-date lines. The tobacco'll be worse, the paper'll be worse, the wages worse than ever. If they can spend still less on the stuff and more on the "ads." they'll double their income.

DICKINSON.

Fresh "tips," I suppose?

GEORGE.

Don't mention the word—I invented it! Fancy a man making a fortune out of a monosyllable and nobody—not even his own employees—one penny the better. One night I happened to think of it. Next morning I went down to the office and said, "Why not nick-name our stuff?" So we started our Turf Tips and Stock Exchange Tips and Blue Jacket Tips and Tommy Tips. The idea caught on. Our business went up by leaps and bounds. You've seen our posters?

DICKINSON.

Can't escape 'em. But why don't you make 'em more artistic? A really artistic poster——

BAXTER.

(*Interrupting.*) All posters are a mark of the beast. But what are you going to do next? Not take to cocoa, I hope, as a compromise!

GEORGE.

That would be nearly as bad from my point of view.

BAXTER.

Most men when they make "the great refusal" begin with carpentering—and do it damned badly.

GEORGE.

No, I shan't be a carpenter. I'm going to make picture-frames—artistic frames with gesso. I can make them quite decently. I thought of keeping a little newspaper shop as well. It'll give a chance of pushing our literature.

DICKINSON.

(*With encouraging cheerfulness.*) Duty—self-sacrifice—the simple life! Now you'll know what it is to be happy.

GEORGE.

(*Getting up and walking about restlessly.*) I—I—hope so. But there are awful difficulties to face. For instance, there are the children.

BAXTER.

We must think of the forces of the future—"a little child shall lead them."

GEORGE.

Yes, of course. But if you're an out-and-out Socialist, children are a complication.

DICKINSON.

I suppose that's why most of us have so few or none?

BAXTER.

Don't talk like that! If we're going to capture the world, we must multiply as fast as possible. Don't they say "the more the merrier"?

DICKINSON.

The women don't say so nowadays.

BAXTER.

Unfortunately! One constantly hears "There's no place for the child in modern life."

GEORGE.

If that were true it condemns modern life—it damns it utterly!

DICKINSON.

You can't expect to have everything, old chap!

GEORGE.

As far as we're concerned, there are practical difficulties. Schools! I can't conscientiously send Harold to a public school—besides, I couldn't

afford it if I wished to. The children belong to the people—they are the people. They'll have to go to a Provided School.

DICKINSON.

Of course—why not? I began in a Board School.

GEORGE.

Still, there are things one can't help shrinking from—accents, infections, acquaintanceships. Their mother will be horrified—naturally!

DICKINSON.

Why, you're the very man who preaches about Walt Whitman and human fellowship, and "nobody being common or unclean."

GEORGE.

(*Grimly.*) When I rashly said "nobody was common or unclean," I ought to have made an exception in favour of certain children.

BAXTER.

Do your kids all the good in the world! None of that pestilential nonsense about "public school tone." A Provided School will make 'em see life seriously. If it makes 'em dissatisfied, so much the better.

GEORGE.

Poor dears! You haven't got any children,

Baxter. After all's said and done, it's rather a wrench to break with one's class.

BAXTER.

Class! You don't usually talk to us about class.

GEORGE.

No. But to-night I'm a bit upset, I suppose. Don't forget I'm taking a plunge and dragging the family down with me.

BAXTER.

I admire your courage. It's magnificent—but it isn't Fabian.

DICKINSON.

(*Patting* TREMAYNE *encouragingly on the shoulder.*) You're awfully plucky, old man!

BAXTER.

(*Heartily.*) You are, indeed. Don't think I'm criticizing, please. I want to encourage you.

GEORGE.

We mustn't forget the ladies. If they don't mind smoking they might join us here. It's snugger when we're a small party.

(*They all rise. He goes.*)

BAXTER.

It's a fine thing to do. He's giving up two or

three thousand a year. I like a man who acts as well as talks. They're rare enough!

DICKINSON.

The Sermon on the Mount appeals to him. I believe he would really like to follow its teaching. There'll be ructions with his good lady. She reads the Sermon—he strives to live it.

BAXTER.

Yes, she's parasitic—the tender, clinging, domestic sort, wrapped up in her home and family, though when it comes to what she calls "right and wrong," she can be as obstinate as a mule.

DICKINSON.

I know them—chimney ornaments. One comfort, there won't be any room left very soon for these "dainty rogues in porcelain."

BAXTER.

By the way, I saw Jevans this morning. His wife's gone off with young Learmouth.

DICKINSON.

You don't say so! Was he much cut up?

BAXTER.

He's a sensible modern chap, with lenient ideas, and makes the best of it. I think he may have arranged it, or at least acquiesced.

DICKINSON.

Isn't she George's sister? What'll he say?

BAXTER.

He'll hate it. That sort of thing may be right in theory. We want to loosen the marriage tie and do away with too much subsequent stigma. But still, when it comes to your sister—well, she is your sister.

DICKINSON.

If I were a woman I know I couldn't stand the same man for long. Lots of 'em are getting to feel that nowadays.

BAXTER.

Oh, you're an artist with temperament—and tantrums!

(GEORGE *returns with the ladies.* LUCY TREMAYNE *is a sweet-faced woman of about thirty, under whose gentle and appealing manner may be detected a touch of firmness. Her ideas have been stereotyped, her mind made up. She is difficult to persuade, impossible to convince—above all things, "a womanly woman," with the quiet atmosphere which comes from the old habits and traditional thoughts of other days.*)

(CLARA HARBURN *is a bright, pretty, fashionably gowned young woman, whose*

days are fully occupied with devoting her life to its own amusement.)

(MRS. BAXTER *is a large, handsome woman of about thirty-five, æsthetically dressed, but with quiet good taste. She wears sandals instead of shoes. Her profession is making enamels. Her life is devoted to that, the Woman's Cause, and Social Reform. She is difficult to contradict, impossible to disconcert. Though very calm in manner, she speaks with extreme decision.*)

LUCY.

George has brought us down. We generally sit here when we're alone. He likes to smoke.

BAXTER.

My wife smokes instead of me. She has the nerves of the modern woman—nothing affects them.

GEORGE.

(*Handing cigarettes.*) Then have a cigarette.

MRS. BAXTER.

(*Taking one.*) Thanks.

CLARA.

(*Taking one*). Thanks, awfully. How I envy the girls who work in the factory. It must be such fun rolling up the tobacco.

(*The party gradually settles into chairs.*)

GEORGE.

It's done by machinery. The girls only pack the boxes. The work's frightfully monotonous.

LUCY.

But still, they're earning their living. It's not unhealthy.

GEORGE.

They're dreadfully underpaid.

CLARA.

I'm ashamed of you, George, with all your give-away views! Why don't you pay them better?

GEORGE.

(*Sarcastically.*) Business is business. Why should we pay 'em more than they're worth? (*To the others.*) I speak as "a master."

CLARA.

Can't they strike? I should strike.

GEORGE.

They can't—wretched slaves! They're not organized.

LUCY.

(*Sighing.*) Poor souls! (*To* MRS. BAXTER.) I've got a girls' club at the works. I do what I can. But I'm distressed about the mothers.

MRS. BAXTER.

(*Decisively.*) All mothers must be kept by the State, and their children fed and looked after. There aren't two opinions on that.

LUCY.

I assure you there are. The idea almost shocks me. It's robbing a woman of half the bliss of motherhood and all the comfort of home. I can't help feeling it's rather hard on any woman to have to work—except in domestic service, and so on.

MRS. BAXTER.

(*Still more decisively.*) Every woman should have an occupation. It's the secret of happiness. I live for nothing except the Women's Cause and my enamels. Our taking up work is the only way by which we can become economically independent.

LUCY.

But why should we want to be?

CLARA.

Why? We don't! We want to be extravagantly independent. (*Turning on* MRS. BAXTER *playfully.*) When you've abolished all the rich people, who's going to buy your work?

MRS. BAXTER.

(*Without a smile.*) The State.

CLARA.

Will it pay for it?

MRS. BAXTER.

Yes. In credit notes possibly.

CLARA.

I should prefer hard cash. (*To* DICKINSON.) Will the State be clamouring for your sculpture?

DICKINSON.

If it's good enough. In every town there'll be beautiful avenues of ideal statues leading up to the free institutions—theatres, colleges, that sort of thing.

CLARA.

(*Turning playfully to* MRS. BAXTER.) And our hats? Will the State dare provide them?

MRS. BAXTER.

It may come to that some day—when its organization is perfect.

CLARA.

Ready trimmed?

MRS. BAXTER.

I imagine so. But that's quite a matter of detail.

CLARA.

A matter of detail! I didn't know your horrid State could be quite as horrid as that. I shall

be a passive resister. We shall have to exterminate Socialists, I can see, as enemies to the human race. Father's awfully down on them. He says they're already driving capital out of the country. People are growing nervous. West End trade's getting so bad that if it wasn't for the Americans half of the best shops would be bankrupt.

DICKINSON.

We hope all of them will be bankrupt soon!

LUCY.

(*Naturally shocked.*) Please don't talk like that. It's not right. I know you don't mean it.

DICKINSON.

(*Walking across for another cigarette. He turns to* CLARA.) You say we're trying to spoil all your fun—you're quite wrong. (*With light enthusiasm.*) We want to give you more health and beauty and happiness—much, much more. Only we don't mean merely to give it to you and yours, but to every one. Look at the poor, miserable, undersized, weak-minded wretches we breed nowadays. That's due to our industrial system. We're going to stop it. We're going to teach men the beauty and dignity of the human body. Have you ever strolled through the Tuileries Gardens? The sculpture there is a joy and a tonic. It opens one's eyes to what we may do in the future.

LUCY.

(*With a touch of chill disapproval.*) I hope we may never have anything quite so French in London.

MRS. BAXTER.

Clothes are a worn-out survival. We ought to be able to discard them whenever we choose.

CLARA.

We do! We do now—whenever we can afford to buy new ones!

MRS. BAXTER.

Hats and gloves and shoes and stockings are going fast. I'm glad to say women are losing their morbid sense of shame.

DICKINSON.

While the men seem catching it.

MRS. BAXTER.

All those artistic dancers are educating the public.

DICKINSON.

Of course. They're the best of missionaries. They're letting it down by degrees.

BAXTER.

The dress?

DICKINSON.

No, the public.

CLARA.

(*With mock horror.*) But do you really mean we're to have no new clothes—no fresh gowns or anything?

DICKINSON.

Not at all. One must use common sense. I don't want unclad people walking about the streets, of course. But we're going to have plenty of health places where we can get fit by wearing nothing. Like all those Freiluftgymnasien in Copenhagen. Air, sun, health, physical culture, nudity! That's my receipt for most of the ills we suffer from.

LUCY.

(*Puzzled and vaguely scandalized.*) We live in strange times. You never know what people may not be proposing next.

GEORGE.

You're right there, Lucy. Always keep prepared for anything, and you'll never be shocked.

LUCY.

I hope I shan't have cause.

DICKINSON.

We'll convert you. Won't we, George?

GEORGE.

We'll do our best.

BAXTER.

(*Rising.*) Pray excuse me. I'm due at the newspaper office. (*Every one rises.*) (*To Lucy.*) Good-night. (*To his wife.*) Good-night.

(*He shakes hands all round, and goes out accompanied by* GEORGE.)

LUCY.

I suppose your husband won't be back till very late?

MRS. BAXTER.

I suppose not. I never see him till breakfast.

LUCY.

I shouldn't like that. I can't bear sleeping alone.

CLARA

She's frightened.

LUCY.

No, I'm not; but I don't like being alone—it's so lonely.

MRS. BAXTER.

Sharing a bed or a bedroom is quite old-fashioned. It's unhygienic.

LUCY.

I am quite old-fashioned.

(*The servant enters with a tray, on which are whisky, soda, and a jug of hot water.*)

LUCY.

Have something to drink?

MRS. BAXTER.

Thanks! I should like some hot water.

LUCY.

(*Pouring it out, but speaking to* DICKINSON.) And you?

DICKINSON.

I'll help myself if I may.

LUCY.

Please do.

(*He takes a whisky and soda.*)

DICKINSON.

My one fear is, the new State may decree prohibition.

(GEORGE *returns.*)

GEORGE.

I met rather an interesting youth at the Working Men's Club last night. His name's Gwotkin—nineteen, clever, delicate—I should say

consumptive. He's awfully keen on our work—wants to write. I meant to speak to your husband about him.

MRS. BAXTER.

I'll mention him to Herbert, but there isn't much chance. I know these youths. They need training before they're any use. A heart gushing over with love for the poor and bile for the rich doesn't in itself make a journalist.

CLARA.

Though it may make a Cabinet Minister.

MRS. BAXTER.

It's possible. We have nothing to do with Cabinet Ministers.

DICKINSON.

Rather not! They're the touts and cheap-jacks outside the show, put up to blow the trumpet and do the patter—that's what they're paid for. Both parties are equally time-serving and contemptible.

GEORGE.

As long as they're financed by capitalists, they must be.

LUCY.

(*Feeling the ground all the time slipping from under her feet.*) But we must have a Government, George.

DICKINSON.

Do you know whom we're governed by now? A gang of crimps called the Party Wire-pullers. They've got the cash, and they run the show.

CLARA.

Then all the Reform Bills have been a mistake, after all. (*To* LUCY.) You know uncle always said so.

(*The company are too flabbergasted to speak.*)

MRS. BAXTER.

(*Rising to end such folly.*) I must be going—it's getting late.

DICKINSON.

I take your tube, so I'll join you.

(*They both say good-night to the ladies, and go out accompanied by* GEORGE.)

CLARA.

(*Calling after him.*) A taxi, please, George. (*To her sister.*) My dear, they're too killing for words! What a set! Did you hear what she said about hats? And she wasn't joking!

LUCY.

Yes.

CLARA.

And what they said about clothes? Do you really think they're quite sane?

LUCY.

I'm afraid so, dear. I'm very depressed about the future.

CLARA.

Oh, nonsense! They can't do much harm. It's only their queer conceit and oddity. All women at least are conservatives at heart. That's why we must get the vote somehow.

LUCY.

I used to think so, but now I'm not sure. Women seem changing like everything else.

CLARA.

The best of George is, his talk's all talk. One knows he means nothing by it.

LUCY.

(*Warmly.*) He means everything he says. He is filled with pity for all the wrong and suffering round us. He'd do anything if he could put a stop to it.

CLARA.

So should we all, dear. But one can't do much except subscribe to charities. And they say they generally do more harm than good.

LUCY.

Besides, even George is changing. I don't quite know what he wants, but he's restless and discontented. There's something horrid coming that

I shall hate. I feel such a worm because I'm quite happy just as I am. I suppose I'm old-fashioned. I don't like change.

CLARA.

Have you noticed that the men with super-noble natures hardly ever get on with their wives?

LUCY.

Perhaps they marry the wrong women.

CLARA.

(*Emphatically.*) Yes, dear. And don't they jolly well let 'em know it!

GEORGE.

(*Entering.*) The taxi.

CLARA.

Kissing her sister.) Good-night, dear. Thanks for a very amusing evening. (*To* GEORGE.) Your set's getting queerer than ever. I didn't know such people existed. I shall have plenty to entertain my partners with at the dance on Tuesday.

LUCY.

(*Kissing her.*) Good-night, dear. Love to father.

(GEORGE *goes out with* CLARA.)

(LUCY *tidies back the chairs, and then picks up the "Spectator."*)

(GEORGE *returns, and looks over her shoulder.*)

GEORGE.

(*After a moment.*) Do you like the *Spectator?*

LUCY.

Yes; it's so satisfactory and sustaining. I wish you read it, dear.

GEORGE.

(*Very gently.*) Please don't read any more just now. I want to talk to you.

(*He takes it away from her quietly, and folding it, stands with his back to the fire while he continues.*)

GEORGE.

You know what I've always felt about our business. It's not as though it were merely one of those businesses which are non-productive——

LUCY.

But it is productive. It produces cigarettes.

GEORGE.

I mean economically non-productive. It doesn't really increase the wealth of the country.

LUCY.

I dare say. It increases ours, though.

GEORGE.

(*Warming.*) It's a business which fattens on the lives of others. You understand? In order

that you and I may live in luxury, we must do harm to our fellow-creatures.

LUCY.

It seems dreadful when you put it like that. I only wish you were rich enough to retire.

GEORGE.

(*With emphasis.*) I have retired.

LUCY

(*Springing up and coming towards him delightedly.*) Oh, George, I'm so glad! I know how you've stuck to it, though you hated the whole concern. It's nice to think you can afford to get out of it.

GEORGE.

(*In a curious voice.*) I can't. That's why I've done so. We shall have to live now in quite a different way—a very small way. It will be the sacrifice we make to duty.

LUCY.

(*Leaning affectionately on his shoulder.*) I know your good heart, George, and how you live for others. I don't want to be selfish. If you think we can really help people by going into a smaller house, I shan't complain. I shall be proud to back you up. But don't forget that the less we spend the more the tradespeople will suffer.

GEORGE.

(*Tenderly.*) There's a brave little woman. (*He kisses her.*) We shall be very poor. We shall have hardly anything.

LUCY.

(*Starting back.*) Why? You're not bankrupt?

GEORGE.

I'm as good. I've turned my back on the old life, once for all. I've given up wealth and the world's consideration in order to tread the higher path. (*Stretching out his arms appealingly.*) Let us tread it, dear—hand in hand—together.

LUCY.

But can't you put off retiring till you've made enough money?

GEORGE.

Impossible! That would be the basest cowardice.

LUCY.

But people *will* have cheap cigarettes. If *you* don't make them, somebody else will.

GEORGE.

(*Indignantly.*) Oh, Lucy—Lucy—don't say that! It's the devil's excuse for every sin.

LUCY.

And you always told me you restrained your partners. They'll be able to do much more harm when you're gone. Have you thought of that?

GEORGE.

Yes, yes. When one tries to do right, in the horrible mess of our civilization, one's liable to bring evil as well as good to others—I know that. But that mustn't stop us. If one does right it will all turn out for the best, in the long run.

LUCY.

Where are we going?

GEORGE.

(*Rigidly.*) To a little shop.

LUCY.

(*Gasping.*) To a little shop!

GEORGE.

To a little newspaper shop in Notting Hill.

LUCY.

That's impossible!

GEORGE.

No. I intend to take it.

LUCY.

(*Indignant—outraged.*) You must be mad!

GEORGE.

I've become a fool in the eyes of the world that I may help my fellow-creatures. You believe the New Testament was divinely inspired. Don't you wish to follow its teaching? Have you forgotten the words: "Love not the World, neither the things that are in the World?"

LUCY.

Of course not! But people in our position, even the most religious people, *don't* keep little shops.

GEORGE.

(*In his turn growing hotter.*) Never use that disgusting word "position"!

LUCY.

What word may I use, then?

GEORGE.

None! We shall have no position.

LUCY.

It's degrading. We don't belong to the shop-keeping class. I ought to have been consulted first.

GEORGE.

My mind was made up. It would only have distressed us both. Perhaps the thought of you and the children has made me procrastinate. I'm sorry I didn't speak before.

LUCY.

I ought to have been consulted first. Father'll never allow it.

GEORGE.

Your father's consent will not be asked.

LUCY.

It will by me. And what's to become of the children? You can't wish to ruin them as well!

GEORGE.

They'll have to go to school—a Provided School.

LUCY.

What's that?

GEORGE.

A Board School.

LUCY.

(*With lofty certainty.*) Oh, of course that's impossible.

GEORGE.

(*With conciliation.*) I don't think we need discuss it now. My mind's made up. I go to the shop whether you come with me or not.

LUCY.

(*All trace of temper gone, but in deep distress.*) It all seems so horrible. I can't realize it yet.

These wicked, crazy people have got hold of you, dear, and dragged you down. They play on your kindness of heart. They make a tool of you. I've seen it coming on for years, like some vice such as secret drinking. I've struggled and struggled to save you, and all in vain. (*On the edge of tears.*) Oh, George, I'm very unhappy! Forgive me—I hardly know what I'm saying. (*She leans against him.*) But you know I'm coming with you.

GEORGE.

(*Putting his arm around her.*) Poor child—poor child! I'm asking a terrible sacrifice. You can't help suffering. Don't criticize, Lucy, but help me—I need your help so much. I hope you won't only come for my sake, but because you feel it's right.

LUCY.

You know how I love you, George. I'll do anything—even keep a shop to please you. But don't ask me to believe in your views. It's hopeless. I never shall.

GEORGE.

(*Sadly.*) Then we must make the best of it. But I'm like Pilgrim fleeing from the City of Destruction. I daren't look back.

LUCY.

Pilgrim left his wife and children, but nothing shall ever make us part.

GEORGE.

No, darling—nothing, nothing! (*He walks a step or two, then returns.*) I've another bad piece of news, though, thank Heaven, it doesn't affect you much. Laura has run away from her husband. It's better to tell you, because you may hear it at any time.

LUCY.

(*Shocked.*) Oh, George—how horrible! Why?

GEORGE.

They didn't get on.

LUCY.

She's gone off—alone?

GEORGE.

(*Hastily.*) No—with young Learmouth. They got very intimate—going about together for social work. She's made a fool of herself, because she has got a false idea that sexual liberty is part of the new morality.

LUCY.

(*Breaking out bitterly.*) The new morality! It's all this Socialism—this accursed Socialism! It's immoral, sinful, godless! Every one knows it destroys the family. It's turned her into a wicked woman.

GEORGE.

(*Warmly.*) It's not true. It's not right to say that. Homes are broken up in every rank of life. It's vice, not Socialism. Socialism will build with bricks of new virtue. But its foundations rest on the old. Don't be uncharitable. We must forgive poor Laura.

LUCY

I shouldn't wish to be hard on the wretched woman. I suppose we shall never see her again.

GEORGE.

I can't say.

LUCY.

Of course we can't receive her in future.

GEORGE.

"To know all is to pardon all."

LUCY.

Not a life of open sin.

(*She moves towards the door. He throws himself into a chair and begins to refill his pipe.*)

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE :—*The living-room behind the little shop in Notting Hill is small and dark. Its back window looks into a sunless court-yard. On the left is the door to the shop; on the right, the fireplace and door to the kitchen. There is an unusual air about the place suggesting cultivation blended with poverty. The wallpaper is shabby but is hung with the pictures from the old home. There is a book-filled bookcase. The tables are also covered with books as well as half-finished art-frames, children's toys, etc. Everything is perfectly neat, but crowded together a little incongruously. The statuette stands on the mantelshelf flanked by old china, a tin of tobacco, pipes, and so on. There are remnants from the old life—a couple of beautiful chairs and a French table. A typewriter stands on a small table in the window. Hats and coats are hanging on pegs by the shop door.*

(*The hour is* 8 *a.m.* LUCY, GEORGE'S *sister* LAURA, *and* HAROLD *and* MILLIE *are seated at breakfast.* LAURA *is a*

hard, sharp, capable woman of about twenty-five, who, feeling herself to be one of the fittest to survive and conquer, entirely enjoys the struggle for life. The children—aged ten and eight—are bright, pretty, and especially neatly and suitably dressed. LUCY *looks rather pale and worn.*)

GEORGE.

(*Entering from the shop and seating himself. To his sister.*) Good morning!

(*The children jump up, run round and kiss him.*)

MILLIE.

Where's our *Daily Mirror,* daddy?

GEORGE.

Here. (*He hands it her. She returns to her place and looks at it while she eats.*)

MILLIE.

It's the most beautiful paper in England—isn't it, father?

HAROLD.

(*Producing a sovereign.*) Look what grandfather gave me yesterday—a pound!

GEORGE.

Let me keep it for you.

HAROLD.

(*Alarmed.*) He said I might spend it—and buy something for mother with half. He said you don't give mother enough money. Why are you so unkind?

GEORGE.

Because now we haven't got much. Spend it all on mother—there's a good boy.

LUCY.

No, no, Harold. Mother wants nothing. We'll spend half together and keep the rest. Would you call Matilda?

(*He goes to the kitchen door and calls* MATILDA. *Then returns to his place.*)

HAROLD.

Grandfather says he'll give me a big house some day. He says you'll try to stop my having it—but you won't, daddy, will you?

GEORGE.

Grandfather was only joking.

LUCY.

(*To the servant entering.*) When are we going to have our tea?

MATILDA.

(*A young, not untidy servant.*) The water don't boil yet.

LUCY.

Why not? It's getting late.

MATILDA.

The fire wouldn't light. The sticks are damp. You can't 'ave no tea yet.

GEORGE.

(*With the most cheerful resignation.*) Then we must make the best of it and do without.

LAURA.

Certainly not! Bring in the kettle, Matilda—I'll boil it up on the spirit lamp. (MATILDA *goes.*)

LUCY.

I don't think we've got enough spirit.

LAURA.

Leave it to me. Matilda's a fool. (*She rises, gets out the spirit lamp, puts it on the hob and lights it.*)

LUCY.

She's very willing, but she's forgetful. We may have to part with her.

HAROLD.

Why haven't we got much money? We used to have lots.

GEORGE.

I'll tell you when you're older, Harold. You won't want much money then.

HAROLD.

Yes, I shall—lots and lots. Mother says if I make a great deal of money when I'm grown up, I can have a motor—six cylinders—sixty horse-power.

(*The servant brings in the kettle.*)

GEORGE.

(*Turning to his wife.*) We may not be able to afford a servant at all. My frames don't sell. The shop hardly pays in spite of all the degrading rot we stock, and our own literature doesn't go off as well as I hoped. Which is the worst—to go bankrupt or sell comic postcards? (*To his sister.*) How hopeless life is! It was impossible to be consistent and make a fortune in business, and now it's impossible to be consistent and make any money at all!

LAURA.

You always were a theorist, George. March for the Promised Land—but rob the Egyptians first! Try actress and prizefighter photos.

HAROLD.

Oh, yes, daddy, do! It'll make our shop swanky.

LUCY.

Please don't use that horrible word.

HAROLD.

Why not? The other boys do. There's a boy at school whose mother sings at a music-hall. She's Miss Pansy Belgrave, and she's got a boy and hasn't a husband. Isn't that funny!

LUCY.

(*Hastily.*) He must be dead.

GEORGE.

(*To* LAURA.) I seem to have no time for social work, and I'm awfully keen on that.

LUCY.

I'm afraid, dear, I'm not strong enough to get on without a servant. But I'm sure father would pay for one gladly.

GEORGE.

I won't touch a penny of his. I would sooner go to the workhouse!

LAURA.

That sounds all right. But what about your

wife and children? They've not been brought up to rough it.

HAROLD.

I've spilt some butter on my "trawsers."

GEORGE.

Say "trousers."

HAROLD.

All the boys say "trawsers."

LUCY.

Yes, but you're not a common little boy. You're a little gentleman.

(*She rises, and makes the tea.*)

GEORGE.

(*Gently.*) I thought we had dropped the word "gentleman"?

LUCY.

I never shall. We need it more than ever. The children must be helped to remember we're not common tradespeople. The roof leaked again last night in the children's room. It hasn't been mended yet.

GEORGE.

(*Warmly.*) I've been twice to the landlord about it. He promised to get it mended a month ago, but nothing's been done.

LAURA.

What can you expect of a landlord!

GEORGE.

(*Flaring up.*) What, indeed! Landlord and tenant—vampire and victim! Rent is the greatest wrong of our social system. It's really the blackmail we pay to Monopoly to spare our lives. We must tax it out of existence. I'm glad that we should have something to bear for one thing—we can realize better what the poor must endure.

LUCY.

Yes. But what about the leak?

GEORGE.

The kids must learn to put up with it. It will be a lesson.

LUCY.

We shall have them ill if we don't take care.

LAURA.

Get a sheet of zinc—nail it over the place, George, and keep your breath to cool your porridge!

LUCY.

They are looking pale already. They ought to have meat for breakfast.

GEORGE.

But, my dear, we've become vegetarians. We can't possibly——

LUCY.

(*Interrupting.*) I've ordered some bacon.

MILLIE.

(*Shouts with delight.*) Bacon—nice bacon! We're going to have bacon!

LUCY.

You and I may injure our health on principle, but I can't allow the poor children to suffer.

GEORGE.

(*With real compunction.*) But do take some meat, dear, as well. I never dreamt that giving it up wouldn't suit you.

LUCY.

(*Touched.*) It's kind of you to say that, George. I'll order some for myself and the children. I'm afraid we need it. I suppose it's the force of habit.

GEORGE.

Tom hasn't had anything yet. (*Calls.*) Tom —Tom!

(TOM GWOTKIN, *a delicate, hectic, neurotic youth, enters and seats himself, leaving the door ajar.*)

TOM.

A man's just come in and said he wanted his morning paper left at his house. Several people have spoken about it lately.

GEORGE.

Of course! You'd better take them round first thing to-morrow.

TOM.

(*Rather sulkily.*) Can't you get a boy?

GEORGE.

Can't afford one! Besides, that sort of casual labour for boys is demoralizing—it leads to unemployment.

TOM.

I thought when I came here I should help to spread the Light—you'd get me some writing in one of our papers. I didn't come here as an errand boy.

GEORGE.

There's one thing you yet have to learn, Tom, and that's the dignity of labour. A true man is never degraded by any work, so long as it's useful.

TOM.

Even the booksellers didn't make me carry parcels. I was behind the counter—and that was

a Tory shop! When we've made the State master, my job'll be writing poetry and plays.

LAURA.

(*Caustically.*) Tempered, I hope, by some useful work in the sewers!

HAROLD.

I wonder if I shall get any fleas to-day?

LUCY.

Hush, dear, hush!

HAROLD.

(*Not to be repressed.*) Millie got two fleas yesterday. Mother caught 'em!

LUCY.

(*With awful meaning.*) They were not exactly —fleas!

GEORGE.

Never mind. Treat it all as you would an unpleasant practical joke. (*To the children.*) Most poor children haven't got a good mother like yours. You must set an example. That's one of the reasons I send you to school. If clean children go to school, the dirty children may want to be clean as well.

MILLIE.

But I hate dirty children. Rosey Perkins looks

so funny. She's had her head shaved. Why did her mother do it?

LUCY.

Perhaps her head was—poorly. (*Bitterly.*) Your head may have to be shaved in a day or two.

HAROLD.

(*Cheered at the prospect.*) You'll look like a funny old man, Millie! It'll make the boys bust with laughing.

MILLIE.

(*Bursts out in horror.*) I won't have it shaved! —I won't have it shaved!

LUCY.

Hush! (*Rising.*) It's time you were off to school, children. (*Goes to the kitchen door and calls.*) Matilda, you can clear away.

GEORGE.

(*Rising.*) Is it schooltime yet?

(*The maid enters with a tray.* LAURA *rises, carries her cup to the typewriting-table and begins to work. The click of the machine is heard continuously.* LUCY *helps the children to collect their books and get ready.* TOM *remains seated.*)

LUCY.

They mustn't miss their Bible lesson.

TOM.

(*Grumbling, sarcastic.*) You can't say I've *wasted* time over breakfast!

GEORGE.

I hope you've had enough, Tom?

TOM.

Enough for an errand boy!

GEORGE.

(*To the children.*) All right. Run away. Be good children, and learn as much as you can at the Scripture class.

LUCY.

That'll please mother and father more than anything.

(*She kisses them as they run out.*)

LAURA.

(*To* GEORGE.) I'm so glad you said what you did about the Bible lesson.

GEORGE.

Children are better for some religion. It gives their imagination a standard before reason is developed.

LUCY.

(*Distressed.*) Oh, George, how can you talk like that! I couldn't bear the vexations of life for a day if it wasn't for religion—and prayer.

GEORGE.

(*In a low voice to* LUCY. *They are standing by the fireplace.*) I know, dear. Don't think I ever sneer at your faith. I wish I could share it.

LUCY.

You will some day, George, if my prayers are answered.

(*The shop bell rings.* GEORGE *and* TOM *go into the shop.*)

LUCY.

(*To the maid who has loaded the tray.*) I'll come and help you to wash up.

(*They go out together.*)

(GEORGE *returns with an armful of morning papers, which he proceeds to arrange.*)

GEORGE.

Poor Lucy! I'm quite concerned about her. She's not looking the thing at all. I'm afraid she's not fitted for our life.

LAURA.

(*Typing all the time.*) Absolutely unfitted!

She was brought up in a self-indulgent home—never taught to do anything useful.

GEORGE.

(*Nettled.*) She naturally wasn't brought up to this kind of thing. She was brought up as a lady, and I'm glad of it. She can't, of course, see things from my point of view at present. That makes her sacrifice all the finer. She's worried about the children just now. So am I. With our principles, a Council School ought to be the right thing—till the State provides a better. But somehow it's disappointing.

LAURA.

Children are always a stumbling-block. That's why we didn't have any.

GEORGE.

(*A little shocked—protesting.*) But the family is the foundation of everything. We always declare it's a libel to say that Socialism destroys the family.

LAURA.

It's the family that keeps up the feudal abuses. It stands in the way of progress. It's obstructive. It doesn't work nowadays. It will have to be readjusted—or limited.

GEORGE.

A house is so desolate without children. You

can hardly call it a home. They bring worry, anxiety, even sorrow, but the happiness swallows up all that. Doesn't love bring children—and children love?

LAURA.

You're just a romantic man, George! Your ideas about women are twenty years behind the times. You're still Oriental. We've done with being cherished and cosited. All that coddling that some women fish for is really prostitution. We have so much outside work nowadays: the maternal instinct is weakening. We mistrust the idea of babies. They hamper our usefulness. How can a woman be a pioneer with a lot of brats hanging round her?

GEORGE.

But if the race is to be improved the best must multiply faster than the worst. Science is clear on that.

LAURA.

(*With decisive emphasis.*) If the good of the human race depends on the subjection of women—and it possibly may—then all I can say is, "damn the race!"

GEORGE.

You don't know what you're talking about!

LAURA.

Perfectly! It's you who won't understand that

our views on sex are progressive. Lots of us are sick of the thraldom of marriage—the drudgery of motherhood. We're refusing to turn ourselves into breeding-machines to please any man. If we wish to have children, we'll have them; and if not—not!

GEORGE.

(*Open-mouthed.*) My dear Laura! Without consulting your husbands?

LAURA.

Don't be silly! (*She stops typing.*) As for you and Lucy—you're opposite characters, and your views are absolutely opposed. You'll never be happy together.

GEORGE.

What do you mean?

LAURA.

What I say. (*Resuming her work.*) Charles and I never got on, so we both thought it better that I should go off with Learmouth. Learmouth and I found our lives didn't fit—I had to live in town and he wanted the country—so we parted by mutual consent, and I came here. There was no romance, or sex problem, or bitterness on any one's part. We all agree with the New Moral Law. Love is the only warrant for cohabitation.

GEORGE.

(*With indignation.*) Your attitude's cold-blooded and shameless enough in all conscience!

LAURA.

(*Unruffled.*) Exactly! Jealousy—like war—is merely a savage survival. We three behaved like rational beings—not savages—and so are perfectly happy. Don't be sentimental. You and Lucy would both be far happier if you separated.

GEORGE.

(*Furious.*) How dare you say that! We're devoted to each other—Lucy and I! (*He can hardly find words for his indignation.*) Why—we—we love each other with a love you couldn't conceive, much less understand! If we ever seem to differ—or differ—it's all my fault. I dare say I made the change too abruptly. Nature works slowly by degrees—and so should we.

LAURA.

(*Quite calm.*) Well, don't forget my advice. You'll never be happy together, and the sooner you separate the better.

GEORGE.

Please keep your advice till it's asked for! . . . You know nothing about us.

LAURA.

(*Rising.*) I've an article to take down to the office. (*Unhanging her hat.*) The *Daily Phone* people mean to keep me busy.

(*She goes out.* GEORGE *follows with papers, but returns at once. After a moment* LUCY *enters.*)

LUCY.

Has she gone?

GEORGE.

Yes.

LUCY.

I heard her stop. The clatter of that machine almost drives me mad.

(*She moves about tidying the place as she talks.*)

GEORGE.

(*With concern.*) I'm sorry, dear; you're not feeling fit. Don't overwork yourself. Let Matilda do more.

LUCY.

My stupid nerves are getting affected, I think. It's not the work, it's the life.

GEORGE.

That ought to be healthy enough.

LUCY.

It's difficult to put it exactly into words. I seem to disapprove of so many of your ideas. I lie awake at night—thinking—and thinking—and trying to persuade myself that it's I who am in the wrong. But I can't! After all, we're made by our upbringing, and I can't believe that this is a good life for any of us. I'm sure it's not good for the children.

GEORGE.

Poor dear! (*Kisses her.*) Don't worry about it all just now. Have faith. You'll look at things differently after a bit.

LUCY.

No, George—never! (*A moment's hesitation, then firmly.*) We can't go on like this.

GEORGE.

We can if we're brave.

LUCY.

No! It's time I spoke out. There are several things I want to talk over. I've put it off from day to day, George, because I didn't wish to hurt your feelings.

GEORGE.

No fear of that, dear. There must never be anything between you and me.

(*A little apprehensive, he nervously fills his pipe.* LUCY, *also nervous and apprehensive, speaks with hesitation throughout.*)

LUCY.

Need Tom have all his meals with us?

GEORGE.

I pay him starvation wages. I can't afford better ones. It's more economical.

LUCY.

It crowds up the room so.

GEORGE.

I'm trying to get him a place at the Working Men's Club. That'll solve the difficulty. (*Lights his pipe.*)

LUCY.

And need Laura live with us? She's not—— (*Confused.*) Well! think of her past. Her influence isn't good for the children.

GEORGE.

I know what you mean. I agree with you. But we must have her here to help pay the rent.

(*Puffing at his pipe.*) Everything comes back at last to the question of rent. Rent! It's our Moloch!

LUCY.

(*With a little sigh.*) Very well. She'll have to stay, I suppose. But it's not right. Her being here is one of the things I most disapprove of. If it's a question of rent, father would gladly help us.

GEORGE.

I've just told you I won't touch a penny of his.

LUCY.

Then you put your pride before saving our children from contamination?

GEORGE.

We should seek the larger charity that hates the sin but pardons the sinner.

LUCY.

You should think of your wife and children, too. You seem always prepared to sacrifice them.

TOM.

(*Entering from the shop.*) The month's magazines have come in.

GEORGE.

Then take them round. Leave the door ajar. I shall hear if any one comes in.

(TOM *goes.*)

LUCY.

I want to speak to you about the children's school. (*Summoning up courage.*) They really mustn't stay on there.

GEORGE.

(*Speaking with extreme conciliation.*) I'm sometimes tempted to feel that myself. But when I am, I ask myself, "Don't we let little things jar on us too easily? Aren't we over-fastidious?" State schools for all classes answer in Germany.

LUCY.

This isn't Germany—yet!

GEORGE.

(*Putting his case as gently as possible.*) The essence of our faith is cheerful self-sacrifice. Ought we to run away as soon as we're put to the test? We mustn't be selfish about our kids. We must think of the larger issues. If more people did what we're doing, the whole tone of the schools would be raised. Some one must set an example.

LUCY.

I'm giving up everything for you.

GEORGE.

(*Touching her affectionately on the shoulder.*) My darling! I wish you could say, "Not for me, but for conscience' sake."

LUCY.

No—for you! But I won't allow Harold and Millie to be injured. (*After a moment's hesitation.*) I saw father yesterday. He's coming round this morning to speak to you about it.

GEORGE.

(*With controlled indignation.*) I shall not discuss the matter with your father. I allow no man to come between me and my children.

LUCY.

(*Firmly.*) You forget they're my children as much as yours! Haven't you always said it's a proof of the infamous degradation of women that the law should only acknowledge the father's right?

GEORGE.

Yes—I've always said that!

LUCY.

And that the children belong to each parent equally, or, if there were a difference, the mother's natural rights are greater than his?

GEORGE.

I may have said so. It's possible.

LUCY.

(*With maternal fervour.*) You did! Well, my children are going to proper schools, and father's going to send them.

GEORGE.

(*Roused.*) I can't allow that! How can I bring up my children consistently if you thwart me at every turn? What I believe in, I hope to teach them to believe and practise. I want them to learn to forget self and live for others. I'm going to train them at home. I disapprove of boarding schools. (*Compromising.*) I don't say, if we could afford it, I mightn't send them to a co-educational school when they're older.

LUCY.

(*Decisively.*) That, at least, I could never sanction. The truth is, we can't have them brought up here in a little shop as though we were really shopkeeping people. That I'm determined!

GEORGE.

(*With extreme bitterness.*) Then we're only playing at this, I suppose?

LUCY.

Why, of course!

(*The shop bell rings.* GEORGE *goes to the door and ushers in* MR. HARBURN, *who kisses his daughter. He is a large, red-faced, prosperous City financier—not exactly pompous, but weighted by successful experience—not a tyrant, but accustomed to receive obedience. As the sentiments he expresses have worldly wisdom and common sense, he is not accustomed to be contradicted. In a word, he is one of those powerful men who have made England what she is.*)

LUCY.

Perhaps you would like to see George alone?

HARBURN.

I should.

(LUCY *goes out.*)

(HARBURN *takes a seat. His manner is quite friendly, and, at first, patient. It suggests the manner of a kindly personage dealing with a man who is not quite sane.*)

HARBURN.

I've come to speak to you about Harold and Millie. What nice children they are to be sure!

I'm very fond of 'em. I know you can't afford anything better than a Board School, so I've come to make you an offer. I'm prepared to give 'em a first-class education—one which will fit 'em for their station in life.

GEORGE.

Their father has no "station in life," as you call it.

HARBURN.

More shame to him! But their mother has, and means her children to keep it.

GEORGE.

(*With cold politeness.*) It's very good of you. I regret that I must decline your generous offer.

HARBURN.

(*Persuasively.*) Come, be reasonable—use a little common sense! I quite appreciate your love of reform. I'm a Liberal myself—I once was a Radical. But is it fair to the children not to give 'em every advantage? There's nothing like a good education to help 'em to make their way in the world.

GEORGE.

I don't want them to "make their way in the world."

HARBURN.

May I ask why?

GEORGE.

I'm afraid if I explained you would hardly understand. You're a rich banker and I'm an idealist. (*With the eloquence of a pure enthusiast.*) You look on the world as a prize-ring in which the battle of life is fought, where victory means wealth at others' expense and defeat means going under. While I look on the world as a social organism, just emerging from chaos, where wealth will be love—not capital; and all men brothers—not rivals. Where the weak will be helped—the strong be the helpers. And the victorious those who do most good to their fellows. That is my gospel! It used to be called Christianity. It failed. Now it's called Socialism, and is marching on—conquering, and to conquer! I mean to train up my children to follow it.

HARBURN.

(*Still patient.*) Very nice—very nice, indeed! But not practical. (*Meaning to be jocose.*) I think the great success of your business must have been wholly due to your partners' push.

GEORGE.

It was. I always tried to check it.

HARBURN.

(*Grave once more.*) The prosperity of the country depends on push. It's you people who make the unemployed. You know how shocked I was when you threw up your prospects. It was the act of a madman. (*Pause.*) Forgive my asking if you are a Believer?

GEORGE.

I am—in the future of humanity!

HARBURN.

(*Much shocked.*) Then don't compare your so-called gospel with our Christianity. We owe our whole civilization—under Providence—to Christianity and the spirit of rational progress. Socialism is becoming a pest that will have to be put down with a high hand. It's getting into the Press and the pulpit. I'm told it's even got into the theatre. But I don't intend to have my grandchildren poisoned—do you hear! (*Getting angry.*) You may wish to have their future ruined to suit your craze, but their mother and I have made up our minds to stop it. A poor little shop in a slum is no place for my grandchildren.

GEORGE.

(*With extreme self-repression.*) I've said all I've got to say.

HARBURN.

(*Rising and flaring up.*) You're ruining your wife's health as well. I was shocked to see her yesterday. She's too loyal to you to complain. But I pumped it out of her. You're starving them all. I suppose that's one of your beautiful principles; I suppose it's to teach 'em some brand-new form of self-sacrifice. But I'm her father, and I'm going to save her before you kill her with cranky bigotry.

GEORGE.

(*Breaking out.*) You're her father—and so I take more from you than I would from another man. But after what you've said, I shan't stoop to exonerate myself. As far as I am concerned, I've nothing more to add. (*Sternly.*) But be careful! I love my wife and children too much to allow such lies to be told about them. You will repeat them at your peril!

HARBURN.

There's no need to repeat anything here. One is never grounded for lack of scandalous matter in this house! It's no place for a decent woman. I know all about your shameless sister. If you care nothing for the purity of your home—if you've no decent respect for your wife and children —I have! (*Presenting his ultimatum.*) They are going to leave you and coming to live with me.

GEORGE.

You don't know Lucy. She's all love and faith. She'd never desert me. Her home is here.

HARBURN.

We discussed it yesterday. She feels her first duty just now is to poor dear Harold and Millie.

GEORGE.

She's a free agent! She can do what she likes. But I'll never believe it. We'll ask her.

(*He goes to the door and calls* LUCY. *In a moment she enters, paler than ever.*)

GEORGE.

(*Speaking quite calmly and kindly, but with extreme distinctness.*) Your father has offered to educate the children. . . . I've told him my views. . . . He says you wish to leave me and take them with you. . . . I've told him that he is mistaken—he doesn't know you.

LUCY.

(*In a concentrated voice.*) If I stay with you will you let him educate them, and send Harold to a public school?

HARBURN.

(*With unction.*) Eton or Harrow!—Eton or Harrow!

GEORGE.

No.

LUCY.

But they must have a decent education—they must leave the school and this slum. I'm going to put my foot down. You always said a wife should be economically independent. Now you'll have your wish.

GEORGE.

And you won't let me train them as I believe right?

LUCY.

You're not—— (*Hesitates.*) I can't. It would be wrong. It would be a sin. I can't sacrifice them.

GEORGE.

(*In a strange, new voice.*) Then you'd better take them and go. They're legally mine, but morally they belong to both of us equally—I acknowledge that. You can take them—if that's what your conscience tells you is right—and go . . . and go!

LUCY.

(*Taken aback at the ultimatum.*) But only for a visit—a long visit.

GEORGE.

No, for ever! . . . I'm disappointed in you.

HARBURN.

(*A little flustered and only too anxious to escape.*) There! There! Then that's all settled. You better come to-morrow. (*Looking round.*) Nice and snug little room you've got here, to be sure. Good-morning.

(*He hurries out, kissing his daughter.* GEORGE *sees him to the door and returns.* LUCY *stands motionless. They look at each other for a moment and neither speaks.*)

LUCY.

The fire needs some coals.

(GEORGE *fetches a coal-scuttle from the next room and stokes up the fire, then seats himself and buries his head in his hands.* LUCY *suddenly comes to him, pauses, then touches his shoulder timidly.*)

LUCY.

George . . . you couldn't have meant what you said—"for ever"?

GEORGE.

(*Looking up.*) I did.

LUCY.

(*Catching hold of him and bursting into tears.*) Oh, George . . . and I love you so . . . you've broken my heart!

GEORGE.

And my own. But it's better so. Our paths go opposite ways. We should never agree about anything. (*With the saddest voice.*) But I thought we should always cling together.

LUCY.

So did I. . . . I want to do right . . . but it's hard!

GEORGE.

So hard!

LUCY.

Who'll look after you when I go?

GEORGE.

Laura, I suppose.

LUCY.

You won't like that.

GEORGE.

I shall be so wretched nothing will matter then.

LUCY.

Perhaps some day you'll change your views—just a little?

GEORGE.

Never!

LUCY.

The hope of winning you back has kept me alive.

GEORGE.

I might say the same.

LUCY.

Mayn't I hope——

GEORGE.

No! Give it up; we shall never convert each other.

(*The shop bell rings.* GEORGE *goes into the shop.*)

GEORGE'S VOICE.

No, we haven't got *Society Scandal.* We don't stock it. We could get you a copy.

A VOICE.

No, thanks.

GEORGE'S VOICE.

Would you care to look at our picture-frames?

A VOICE.

No. Do you keep Turf Tip cigarettes?

GEORGE'S VOICE.

No.

A VOICE.

Have you any Bluejackets?

GEORGE.

No.

A VOICE.

What sorts do you sell?

GEORGE'S VOICE.

None—at present.

A VOICE.

Then you ought to.

GEORGE'S VOICE.

You can get them two doors lower down.

(LUCY *stands motionless all the time.*)

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE :—*The large hall of a (non-political) Working Men's Club at Fulham. There is a small stage at the end of the room, brilliantly lit. A loan collection of paintings is hung on the walls. It is a "ladies' night," and there is a good-sized gathering of members and their friends. They are mostly working men, and a few have brought their wives and girls. There is a sprinkling of West End people "who have come as 'an experience,' or with a laudable desire to encourage the cause."*)

(*They are all seated facing the stage. There are, however, a few little tables at this end of the hall, at one of which* BAXTER *and* DICKINSON *have chairs.*)

(GEORGE *is discovered standing on the stage and delivering a discourse on Brotherhood. He speaks with warm fervour, as one who has a message to deliver.*)

GEORGE.

It is an utter mistake to say human nature doesn't change. It is fluid—always adapting itself

to new conditions with imperceptible fluctuations. So that as the human race marches towards perfection, it will share in the gentle purification, till at last it transforms mankind, and is transfigured.

When that day comes there will be no wars because there are no soldiers—no poverty because there are no riches—no servitude because there are no masters—and scarce any vice or crime because we shall have trained men to be men, not criminals! In human nature lies the secret of our faith, with its promise of universal happiness and reconciliation.

(*Murmurs of assent.*)

This isn't a set speech, still less a sermon. It's just a simple talk on Brotherhood. Don't let us be tempted to sit still with folded hands dreaming of the good time coming, when the present idea of "I" and "mine" will have merged into "we" and "ours." What can we do at present—now—to help on this glorious rebirth? We can influence our neighbours by our own fidelity. We can set an example of strenuous service and loving endeavour. No day should pass without its quiet self-sacrifice—its little kindnesses and thought for others.

Rivalry, Enmity—that spawn of Capital and Competition—will pass away when we have slain their monstrous parents. Then, and not till then, will warfare cease and mankind be knit together in brotherhood.

Meanwhile, let us at least make a beginning. We can be brotherly to all. (*A Voice:* "Rothschild?") Yes, to Lord Rothschild. And like chivalrous comrades—give our fellows the benefit of the doubt—do a good turn—hold out the helping hand.

Great changes come slowly. Perhaps none of us may live to see the Earthly Paradise. But you and I, meantime, can gladden and sustain the hearts around us. So that through us the grey, tired world may have more love and laughter, friendship and rest, and health and beauty, and at last lie down in peace.

(*Applause.*)

Let each one of us see that he, at least, is consistent. Don't let us be depressed. Never be filled with "the terrible doubt of appearances." Say rather with Whitman:

"I see reminiscent to-day those Greeks and Germanic systems,
See the philosophers all, Christian Churches and tenets, see,
Yet underneath Socrates clearly see, and underneath Christ the Divine, I see
The dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to friend,
Of the well-married husband and wife, of children and parents,
Of city for city and land for land."

(*He comes down. There are murmurs of*

approval and applause. One or two shake him by the hand.)

(*A keen young* CLERGYMAN *springs to his feet. He speaks in a trained voice, fluently.*)

CLERGYMAN.

I want to propose a vote of thanks to our friend for his beautiful address. It's this splended faith of his in the brotherhood of men—no matter their station, or nation, or colour, or creed—which has made me a Christian Socialist. I know politics are forbidden here. But I must add this: I work in a poor London parish, and when I see the sin and poverty, the shame and wretchedness festering there—not due, mind you, so much to the depravity of the victims as to the economic conditions of the very society which condemns them—then I say, "This must be ended!" The cruel shores of to-day are strewn with human wreckage. We send out lifeboats now. But that isn't enough. We must provide first-class ships for every man's life-voyage. If the Laws of Economics say "Impossible," if they come in impious conflict with the biddings of Divine law—they'll have to go.

(*Applause.*)

The world has been ruled long enough by Economists. It must be ruled in future by the Law of God. It will never be happy till it

seeks to be reconciled to Him, and submits itself to His loving guidance.

(*Applause.*)

(*He sits down, and a* WORKING MAN *rises, who speaks uncouthly, with hesitation, but with extreme emphasis.*)

WORKING MAN.

I should like to second that. Our friend has been talking about brotherhood being universal. I'll be brother to any man—even a duke—if he gives me my rights. But as long as he keeps me out of them—I'm his enemy. I say that plain!

(*Loud applause.*)

We don't talk politics here—I know that! (*A Voice:* "*Why drag 'em in, then?*") I don't! It isn't politics—it's better than politics—it's sense—when I ask you who makes the wealth of the country? We do—we working-men! Have we got it? Not likely! I'll tell you what capital is! It's the honey that labour stores up. The rich have stolen our hives. But we're going to get 'em back soon, and have a lick of sweetness ourselves.

(*He sits down amid immense applause.*)

GEORGE.

I thank our friends for the kind way they've spoken about my faith. (*Playfully.*) The last

speaker is only a half-timer now. We'll make him join our Union soon.

(*Laughter.*)

I should like to add this. Men are too much afraid of speaking out their true thoughts for fear of being considered quixotic, or hackneyed, perhaps, or priggish. Don't let us hesitate to be sincere and simple. Fear paradox, not platitude. The thing we ought most to mistrust is brilliant banter! Why don't we show more loving-kindness, more charity, to the world and to each other? *We must—if Socialism is ever to conquer!*

(*He sits down.*)

BAXTER.

(*To* DICKINSON—*still seated at the table.*) That's a nasty one for some of our friends. (*Calls to a* WAITER-BOY *who is passing.*) Boy, bring me some cocoa. (*To* DICKINSON.) You'll have a cup? (*To* BOY.) Another!

(*The* BOY *goes. The* WORKMAN *who has spoken joins another man at the next table. They talk together, while the other couple are also conversing.*)

CHAIRMAN.

(*Rising and announcing.*) Two of our younger members will now give us an exhibition of the noble art of self-defence.

(*Two* LADS *take off their overcoats and go*

upon the stage—stripped to the usual costume. Their backers follow. A boxing match takes place.)

DICKINSON.

(*Not watching the stage.*) He spoke well, don't you think?

BAXTER.

Not bad at all! I liked it. It's not business, of course. But that kind of Ruskinian rhetoric is valuable in its way—it stimulates! His views are too extreme for me. That idea of a shop was fine, though it was bound to be a failure. Evolution works in social institutions, as it works in Nature. A policy of upheaval does more harm than good—it disappoints! Still, I must say he lives up to what he preaches, which few of us do. We're filled with schemes for spending the money of our richer neighbours. But, I've noticed, we're not so fond of yielding our own.

DICKINSON.

Most of us have so little to yield.

BAXTER.

He's doing splended work, and become quite a leader. Have you seen the paper he's started since you've been away—*The Torch?* It's creating quite a sensation.

DICKINSON.

I think at last we're saturating all classes with our ideas. Why, you even find smart women going round in motors and chattering about increment and the death of *laissez-faire*.

(*The cocoa comes.*)

BAXTER.

We've captured the Unions and the Labour Party. It won't be long before we've gripped the whole machinery of government. My only fear is, we're going too fast. It would be disastrous to dislocate the whole framework of society—too suddenly. That is why we mustn't try to abolish Capital. *It will gradually dry up under the warmth of our taxation.*

DICKINSON.

(*Lightly.*) It's rather humorous, isn't it, watching the two parties drift to their doom, while we, "with smiling jaws, welcome the little fishes in"?

BAXTER.

Yes. The Tories are played out and done for. Tariff Reform is their death-rattle.

DICKINSON.

As for our dear friends—the Liberal enemy—it's not that they're hypocritical—they're superannuated. So long as they can spout the old

catch-words and sport the old trade-marks, they're too cock-a-hoop to see the plank they're walking. And they've got happy capitalists among them still—it's amazing!

BAXTER.

They haven't even the wits to see the irony of trotting out their silly old cackle—Peace——

DICKINSON.

(*Interrupting.*) With their naval expenditure!

BAXTER.

"Retrenchment——"

DICKINSON.

With their jolly Budgets!

BAXTER.

"Reform"!

DICKINSON.

When they don't in the least know what they want.

(*The* CLERGYMAN *and one of the Committee are wandering around, engaged in an animated conversation.*)

CLERGYMAN.

It's the Unemployed Question that is unbearable —it's heart-rending!

COMMITTEEMAN.

But, my dear sir—if you abolish all the rich, there'll be more unemployed than ever.

CLERGYMAN.

That's a stale fallacy. The State must keep them—and decently, too!

COMMITTEEMAN.

But where's the money to come from?

CLERGYMAN.

When the State's resumed possession of the land, and buildings, and wealth of the country, there'll be more than enough to go round.

COMMITTEEMAN.

(*Waxing warm.*) But capital's fluid, and wealth is continually being destroyed, and has to be reproduced—or it melts away.

CLERGYMAN.

(*Eagerly.*) Ah, now you're talking like a Political Economist. We don't argue with False Prophets of Baal—we overwhelm them.

COMMITTEEMAN.

(*Good-naturedly.*) Come and look at the pictures. They're a loan collection—the best modern work.

(*They move off.*)

DICKINSON.

What do you think of Votes for Women?

BAXTER.

I suppose it'll come. I advocate it because I don't think it can harm us. Women are all right, unless they're ratepayers or property-holders. And those are fish we shan't even have to swallow. The other fish will have eaten 'em first.

SECOND WORKMAN.

(*Talking to his friend at the table.*) I've been a Liberal all my life, and good old Gladstone's good enough for me.

FIRST WORKMAN.

He ain't a patch on Lloyd George. He never told us we was as good as dukes.

SECOND WORKMAN.

He was a sly old hand, he was! If he'd lived till now he'd have showed you you was better than dukes. He'd have abolished 'em long ago.

DICKINSON.

Democracy's played out, of course.

BAXTER.

But keep the word! People have always confused words with things—Plato pointed that out—and they're much more frightened by names than facts. That's why I never say "Socialist" if

I can use "Progressive." The word's much safer —it lulls!

(*A fashionably dressed woman in semi-evening dress comes down the room, attended by the* COMMITTEEMAN. *She turns to the* WAITER-BOY.)

WOMAN.

Would you kindly call my motor—Lady Dorothy Clarage's motor!

(*The* BOY *goes. She turns rather gushingly to her companion.*)

Thank you so much for such a charming evening. How quaint and delightful everything is! I'm not surprised that Mr. Wells is an optimist. What a sad story about that tobacconist man and his tiresome wife—so silly of her, I think! Why, I should simply love to tuck into a cosy little shop. I've always longed to camp in a slum! (*To the* BOY, *returning.*) The motor—thanks! Good-night.

(*She goes.*)

DICKINSON.

Think of the children's physique and their stunted sense of beauty. The State should put up a life-sized statue of a Greek athlete in every school in the kingdom. It would be a model for the children to live up to.

BAXTER.

A little premature, I'm afraid! They'd better look at the children's bodies first!

DICKINSON.

It would give the poor things a whiff of Greece at any rate.

FIRST WORKMAN.

I ain't a peace-at-any-price man. But a bloated fleet is bluster—it's kept up so that the aristocracy can bully peaceful neighbours. I hate all this militarism and patriotic rot. I'm agin' the Territorials.

SECOND WORKMAN.

I dun' know! We must have something, I s'pose. They ain't too military to look at. I'm not afraid of their shooting too straight.

FIRST WORKMAN.

(*With sly acuteness.*) Ah! it's the officers. They want what they call "discipline." It's their name for swank. We won't 'ave it. We'll 'ave a people's army who'll elect their own officers from among themselves.

DICKINSON.

I haven't seen Tremayne since I came back from America. Has he got his sister with him still?

BAXTER.

No, they didn't get on. I think she found that after all "her soul's adventures among masterpieces," it was better to live alone.

DICKINSON.

Unfortunate affair that was with the wife! I always thought she'd stick to him.

BAXTER.

She wanted the ordinary thing, of course—three sitting-rooms, a cheque-book, and church on Sunday! She didn't mean her boy to be brought up as John the Baptist. Now her father's dead, and she's got all the money, she's awfully anxious to make it up. Between ourselves, my wife's bringing her here to-night.

DICKINSON.

You don't say so!

BAXTER.

I shouldn't think it will come to much.

DICKINSON.

I don't know. It's a pretty problem. As far as talk goes, we're all consistent, of course! But when it comes to living the life, the old, inherited, social forces are awfully strong. George is half conscience, the other half instinct; and he's very fond of her.

(GEORGE *strolls up and greets them.*)

GEORGE.

(*To* DICKINSON.) How are you, Dickey? I haven't seen you since you got back from America. How did you like it?

DICKINSON.

Not much! They've no idea of Collectivism there. It's all hustle and grab. As for the "larger latitude" in life and art, they're early Christian—simply early Christian. Their prudishness is positively pre-Renaissance! They'd hardly look at my work. They wanted to put a fig-leaf on my statue! (*With a change of voice.*) And how are you getting on? How's the shop?

GEORGE.

I gave it up. It seemed to me I was doing as much harm as ever, in a more subtle way, by selling the halfpenny Press—corrupting minds instead of bodies! Even then I couldn't make the place pay without every sort of rubbish. (*With a touch of ironic humour.*) It nearly came to my having to sell our cigarettes again—this time retail, at a penny a packet! So now I'm devoting my time to public work—writing and speaking. (*He calls.*) Boy, a cup of coffee!

FIRST WORKMAN.

What we've got to do is to keep on striking for shorter hours, and then strike for higher wages.

SECOND WORKMAN.

Ain't we doing that now?

FIRST WORKMAN.

Too timid! You'll never get something for nothing at that rate. Arbitration's all rot unless it's fair.

SECOND WORKMAN.

You mean—goes our way.

FIRST WORKMAN.

Of course! The bosses must give in, anyhow.

SECOND WORKMAN.

Peaceful picketing! . . . (*The humour of the idea so overcomes them, it leaves them speechless with laughter.*)

BAXTER.

(*Watching the performance.*) I wonder if we're really "bringing a ray of sunshine into these people's lives," as the phrase goes?

GEORGE.

At least we're doing good. Every little helps.

DICKINSON.

We ought to give them the best of everything—modern, emancipated art! The pictures'll do—some of them are quite advanced. But I'm not so sure about the entertainment! Why don't they put on a Shaw play instead of these grandmotherly sentimental songs?

GEORGE.

The people like homely sentiment! What they really want is variety, and comic picture-palaces.

DICKINSON.

(*With gay irresponsibility.*) I'd make them sit up with variety. I'd stimulate their sluggish wits! This is a private club. Wouldn't it be fun to have a programme entirely made up of things that wouldn't do for the Censor or County Council?

GEORGE.

Your tongue runs away with you, Dickey! In questions of decency, these people put their so-called betters to shame. They're far more particular.

DICKINSON.

Decency—what's that? Merely a matter of habit. We're too conservative!

BAXTER.

You're right. The Censor strangles all serious dramatic art. This is the very place to give it a chance.

DICKINSON.

Hear, hear!

(*The* BOY *brings the coffee to* GEORGE.)

CHAIRMAN.

(*Rises and announces.*) The last item on the programme is a pianoforte solo by Miss Greville. I must ask as many of our friends as possible to remain, as we are going to have a great musical treat.

(*A Lady goes up to the small cottage piano and begins to play a conventional, florid piece. This is the signal for a general break-up. A few remain seated. But most people rise, move about, and greet their friends. Some begin to leave, others look at the pictures. The* COMMITTEEMAN *comes down to* BAXTER'S *table. They rise and greet him.*)

COMMITTEEMAN.

(*To* BAXTER *and* GEORGE.) You're both on the Committee, aren't you?

(*They nod.* DICKINSON *strolls away.*)

COMMITTEEMAN.

We've had a very unpleasant occurrence. Young Gwotkin went off yesterday with all the cash.

GEORGE.

(*Horrified.*) Impossible!

COMMITTEEMAN.

We didn't find it out till this morning. We put

on the police at once. But they think he's got off—the Continent probably.

(MRS. BAXTER *and* LUCY *enter quietly. They move up the side of the room, apparently looking at the pictures, but really scrutinizing the seats. After a minute* MRS. BAXTER *is seen to indicate* GEORGE *to her companion.*)

GEORGE.

(*Much distressed.*) Tom—a thief! Isn't it awful! It's my fault. I ought to have influenced him better. I should have helped him to master his faults. He was filled with noble ideas. But he couldn't stick to anything. He was weak and lazy—he'd no grit. If I'd been more consistent I might have made him a sounder chap. I did try, but all my efforts seem to fail.

BAXTER.

(*Kindly.*) Some lads are hopeless. You can't alter them, do what you will!

COMMITTEEMAN.

But the worst of it—he's gone off with nearly forty pounds. The Club mustn't lose it. Some of us will have to make it up.

GEORGE.

(*Eagerly.*) I'll pay! It's the least I can do. I got him the post here. Of course, I'm responsible!

COMMITTEEMAN.

It's very good of you. That relieves us of a great anxiety. We hardly knew what to propose.

BAXTER.

But, George—can you afford it?

GEORGE.

(*Quite upset.*) No, I can't—I forgot! I haven't even the cash at present. I'll work and save. I've got a hundred a year. You shall have the money in instalments. (*Breaking out.*) It's all this hateful money! When will the world be purged of it!

BAXTER.

Not in our time, at any rate. So let's make the best of what we've got.

GEORGE.

It tempted the boy to ruin. And now the want of it prevents my doing the honourable thing. It's the curse of all of us!

BAXTER.

(*Soothingly.*) Never mind. Don't take it to heart! You're not responsible for the young blackguard. You're too kind-hearted, George—you don't know human nature.

GEORGE.

I don't! I've always tried to believe in it instead of suspecting or spying. And bitterly I've been punished! Who am I to stand up and preach about brotherly influence and example—as though I thought myself a new St. Francis!

BAXTER.

Why not? You have the same unworldly spirit—I can't say more to your face, though I should like to.

(*The Member of Committee tactfully moves away.*)

GEORGE.

Ah, don't say that! It sounds like mockery. I once boasted to my wife that I had become a fool in the eyes of the world to help my fellow-creatures. I seem to have made a fool of myself all round!

(*The two boxing lads are wandering along vaguely, looking at the pictures. They are naturally somewhat puzzled at Art's latest blossom.*)

FIRST LAD.

They say all these 'ere pictures are high art—hung up to elevate our minds—not likely!

SECOND LAD.

They're too top-hole for me! I can't make head or tail of 'em. They ain't got no colour—and what there is has run. The chaps have put in too much turps. I could spot that—'cause I'm a painter. Give me a picture of a racecourse with the jocks up and the horses running!

FIRST LAD.

I like a classy seaside bit—like the post-cards —"I've caught the dears bathing," or "How can I cuddle both?" That's the picture to bring it home to you.

(*They pass on.*)

BAXTER.

Have a seat back in our taxi?

GEORGE.

Many thanks!

BAXTER.

You'll find me somewhere about. My wife ought to be here by now—she wants to see the pictures. (*He looks round.*) Ah, there she is! (*He slips off.*)

(*The music stops. The footlights are lowered. People begin to leave fast.* GEORGE *looks round and sees his wife. They gaze at one another for a long moment and then she advances timidly.*)

GEORGE.

Lucy!

LUCY.

Ah, George! (*She looks at him very wistfully.*)

(*A moment's pause.*)

LUCY.

I was asked—to see the pictures. I thought . . . I was told I should find you here!

GEORGE.

Ah!

(*A moment's pause.*)

LUCY.

Have you heard—father's dead? I'm staying on in his house for the present.

GEORGE.

Yes, I heard that. I didn't write. It seemed a mockery.

LUCY.

He left half his money to Clara and me, half to the children. They'll be very rich when they grow up. I'm afraid you'll be sorry for that.

GEORGE.

(*Eagerly.*) How are they? Tell me all about them. I think of them day and night.

LUCY.

(*Recovering courage.*) They're quite well, and growing fast. Harold has gone to a preparatory school at Reigate. Only the best people send their sons there. They look after the boys and make them thoroughly happy. He enjoys it immensely. Millie has a governess.

GEORGE.

Have they begun to forget their father?

LUCY.

Oh no! They're constantly asking when daddy's coming back. I had to tell them you're so busy—devoting your life to the good of others—you hadn't time for us. It sounded odd, somehow. But I had to say something, and I wasn't going to tell a lie.

GEORGE.

Quite right. Didn't they think it strange?

LUCY.

They can't understand it. I can't understand it. No one can understand it.

GEORGE.

How should they? But you must know it's my love for the children—my overwhelming love for them—that makes me keep away. I couldn't bear to be with them and see them—as I think—corrupted.

LUCY.

Corrupted!

GEORGE.

Yes—corrupted by wealth and self-indulgence. If I saw them again I don't think I could tear myself away.

LUCY.

Then come and see them!

GEORGE.

(*With almost a cry.*) My children—I want my children—and you! That's why I daren't—I mustn't! I, too, should be corrupted. (*With a sudden change of manner.*) You will do me a kindness, Lucy, I know, though I oughtn't to ask it.

LUCY.

Don't put it like that. (*Eagerly.*) Ask me—ask me! I want to be asked to help you.

GEORGE.

Young Gwotkin has stolen forty pounds from here. I want you to lend me the money.

LUCY.

Ah, don't say "lend," George—it hurts my feelings. You know that everything I have is yours. The more you ask for, the happier I shall be.

GEORGE.

Yes, dear—I know! I'll take it as a gift because I feel that will please you most. But oh, the irony of money! Money! One might as well denounce the air one breathes!

LUCY.

You're just like your old self, George—you haven't changed a bit.

GEORGE.

Yes, I have! I mistrust our social order more than ever. I preach the Downfall of Capital. But it's so hard to make one's views work with life.

LUCY.

Do you know why I came here? (*Timidly.*) I wanted to ask you to come back to us.

GEORGE.

(*Almost imploring.*) Don't tempt me, Lucy—you mustn't!

LUCY.

(*Passionately, catching his coat.*) Oh, George, George, come back! (*She looks round.*) There are people still here. (*Rapidly, in a low voice.*) The children want you—I want you; I can't live without you! When I wake and find you're

not by my side, there's a gnawing pain in my heart. And I wake so early every morning!

GEORGE.

Hush, Lucy—I can't bear any more. I want you—and miss you, dear—as much as you miss me. But I've set my face against worldly things. I'm making a great endeavour. I talk about sacrifice. The only one that counts is the sacrifice of self. No, Lucy—it wouldn't be consistent!

LUCY.

Don't be consistent, then.

GEORGE.

You talk as though it were easy to say "No." How little you understand! It's almost killing me.

LUCY.

Tolstoy was as consistent as any one could be. And they say the Countess kept the money.

GEORGE.

He was in a false position. He tried to stifle conscience. He couldn't. He had to leave home at last.

LUCY.

I'm not thinking of him at all. I'm thinking of his poor, broken-hearted wife and children.

You idealists at times can be very cruel to your nearest.

GEORGE.

(*Flinching.*) Oh, don't say that!

LUCY.

You shall work in the fields, or sweep the streets, or anything else disagreeable, if you'd like to. I won't say a word. Only come!

GEORGE.

It isn't that! I don't wish to spend my time in manual labour. But I do try to live a harmless life that should help others—not injure them. I'm getting an influence over men. I'm converting them to a higher life. I couldn't give that up. I mustn't judge your father. But his money was made in a way I think dishonest. If I came I should have to share it. And I ought not to. (*Beginning to waver.*) But it's a great temptation.

LUCY.

(*With passionate pleading.*) Oh, George, think for once of me and the children! Don't desert us! You think too much about money.

GEORGE.

I wonder!

(*The room is now empty. The* WAITER-BOY *has switched off all the electric lights except two. He comes up to them.*)

BOY.

It's closing time, please.

GEORGE.

Yes, of course.

LUCY.

Aren't you coming home?

GEORGE.

(*Torn in two.*) I can't! It would be disloyal.

LUCY.

(*With infinite sadness.*) Oh, George!

GEORGE.

(*Hastily.*) How are you going back?

LUCY.

I've got the carriage here. The footman's outside.

(*They go out together.* BAXTER *and his wife, who have been discreetly in the background, come down.*)

MRS. BAXTER.

I hope he's returning. I'm glad for her sake. It will make her much happier. But as far as he is concerned——

BAXTER.

Oh! it'll make him happier too. He's not like his sister. He has plenty of heart—too much, perhaps! He's too quixotic. It's a mistake to be over-conscientious. I suppose he could talk his wife round a bit. (*To the* BOY.) Please call a taxi.

(*The* BOY *goes.*)

MRS. BAXTER.

She's conventional to the finger-tips. He'll not convert her! She can "pay the piper now, and means to call the tune." He won't have a look in about the children. Still, with a little affectionate tact he might wheedle out some of the cash for the Cause. We need it badly.

BAXTER.

He would hardly like to do that, I'm afraid. He doesn't consider it was honestly made.

MRS. BAXTER.

All the more reason to see that some of it's honestly spent.

(GEORGE *returns in a state of extreme emotional tension.*)

GEORGE.

She asked me to come back. . . . I refused!

BAXTER.

Isn't it rather a pity?

GEORGE.

(*Bursting out.*) Rather a pity! The pain's so great I can't speak of it! (*With a change of voice.*) But how can I go? It would mean conniving at all I denounce. It would mean sharing her father's plunder. Wouldn't it be disloyal to my life's work; a cowardly desertion; another lost leader?

MRS. BAXTER.

(*Facing the situation as a practical woman.*) Not at all—if you use your Will Power and keep your head! Of course, you could still be an active worker.

GEORGE.

(*Catching at a happy straw.*) Could I? She told me I thought too much of money. Perhaps I do. (*Hesitating.*) Isn't my hatred of worldly prosperity growing morbid? (*He begins to waver.*) We talk so much of the Crime of Capital: the very idea gets on our brains. It kills all sense of proportion. It needs a rest. Why should I give up everything to "our little sister, Poverty"? Nobody else would. Why should I?

BAXTER.

Why indeed? If you want a bit of comfort, don't forget there are ways in which a big establishment does help us—swell entertainments and

lots of grub! It catches on with a certain class and gives one a chance to talk them round.

GEORGE.

(*Unheeding.*) I told her I couldn't return . . . and I asked her for money! The humiliation, the cruelty of it, is burning my soul.

BAXTER.

You might change your mind.

MRS. BAXTER.

You better! You'd better go back at once instead of shilly-shallying. You know you'll do it sooner or later. After all, it's the natural thing!

GEORGE.

It's the natural thing! I believe it's false pride that's holding me back.

MRS. BAXTER.

I've no doubt of it.

BAXTER.

I should give her a chance, if I were you.

GEORGE.

(*With a burst of determination.*) I will! I'll give love a chance. I must go—I will go! I can't live without her and the kids. (*Delightedly.*) It's nature. Don't tell me it isn't right. I'm so happy—it must be! I'll surprise them tomorrow.

MRS. BAXTER.

Only don't get perverted. Don't drop *The Torch*.

GEORGE.

Never! Love shall make me all the stronger. I'll redouble my efforts. People will say she's bought me. I don't mind what they say! People are fools. I don't care a rap for appearances. (*Snapping his fingers.*) No. Not that!

THE BOY.

(*Returning.*) The taxi's here.

(*They go out. The* BOY *switches out the last two lights.*)

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

THE FOURTH ACT.

SCENE:—*The drawing-room of the late* MR. HARBURN'S *house in South Kensington. Its furniture is florid and pompous, such as an expensive upholsterer would have provided about* 1880. *The fireplace, with an elaborate overmantel, is opposite.* LUCY *and* CLARA *are seated in front of it, in elaborate evening-mourning dress, for the hour is after dinner, and the evening, Sunday.* LUCY *looks blooming. There is something in her air which suggests self-assurance and prosperity. She is evidently no longer a pale and patient wife, but a woman of some importance.*)

CLARA.

George is a long time over his wine!

LUCY.

He doesn't drink wine.

CLARA.

Well, then, his coffee—or whatever it is he does drink! May the fire be made up? (LUCY *rings.*) He wasn't dressed for dinner—is he going out?

LUCY.

No, I don't think so. He often doesn't change in the evening.

CLARA.

(*Emphatically.*) Then I should make him, dear—always. The servants must think it so odd!

LUCY.

The servants must think what they please. I promised not to worry him when he returned. I never suggest or complain of anything. His coming back has made all the difference to my life. I'm happy now—because we understand each other at last. About the children I'm quite firm, but in other respects we agree to differ.

CLARA.

You don't see too much of each other—that's the secret!

LUCY.

(*Protesting.*) Don't be cynical, Clara! I wish I saw more of him—much more! That's my one disappointment. He's constantly out at his meetings, and so on. He's often out four or five evenings a week. I can't get him to go to parties with me—I wish he would!

CLARA.

I should think so, indeed! it looks so extraordinary! One comfort—he doesn't bring his crazy set home as he used to!

LUCY.

I believe he sees them all in the study. I shouldn't consent to receive them here.

CLARA.

He must be getting more sensible. He's been eating a little meat lately. That's a good sign. I think you're going to conquer.

LUCY.

(*Earnestly.*) It's not a case of conquering, Clara. I want to make him contented here. I want him to feel our house is home.

CLARA.

Does he still run that dreadful rag?

LUCY.

I never inquire.

(*The* BUTLER *enters solemnly.*)

LUCY.

Would you tell Henry to make up the fire?

BUTLER.

Yes, madam.

(*He goes.*)

LUCY.

We never touch on dangerous topics nowadays. It is much better. We get on beautifully.

But for all that, I don't believe his views have altered one bit. I dread his influence on the children. I don't want him to see too much of them. That's why I hope to be able to send Harold visiting in the holidays.

CLARA.

I should think the memory of that dreadful Board School and beastly shop in which you all starved would last a lifetime. I think you've been wonderfully patient!

LUCY.

(*Warmly.*) Oh, don't say that! He's the best of husbands. His fault is he's too unselfish. And some of his views are splendid. They're like the New Testament. Only, unfortunately, they're quite unworkable—and he will try to put them in practice. He would like to follow the text, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." And yet he isn't a Christian.

CLARA.

Perhaps he tries to follow it out for that very reason, just to shame us!

LUCY.

I intend to make him so comfortable he'll cease to condemn things. He's naturally rather fas-

tidious, and we're only living in the way that he was brought up to. He'll surely find it's the right thing—in time.

CLARA.

You do him uncommonly well, dear. That's the secret of making a man contented and soundly Conservative.

(*A young* FOOTMAN *in plush knee-breeches and silk stockings enters, carrying coals, and proceeds to make up the fire.* CLARA *glances at the Sunday paper she holds in her hand.*)

CLARA.

I see Lady Dorothy Clarage was at the opera last night. She wore her diamonds. It's rather dull of the women always to wear their diamonds. Has she a box?

LUCY.

I think so—Tuesdays!

CLARA.

(*Dropping the paper.*) When are we going to move?

LUCY.

Oh, nothing's fixed! Of course, I must discuss it with George before I go farther.

CLARA.

He took that slummy shop without asking you first!

LUCY.

That's quite different—he's my husband. I don't wish to do anything without his approval.

(GEORGE, *in morning dress, comes in, watches the* FOOTMAN *for a moment, then takes the poker from him.*)

GEORGE.

Never mind! I'll poke it. (*The man goes.*) I can't bear to trouble a servant to poke the fire—just as though we were cripples!

CLARA.

It's usual in good houses.

LUCY.

Don't you think, dear, now Clara's going to live with us, we're getting rather cramped for room?

GEORGE.

(*Standing in front of fire.*) There's plenty for me.

LUCY.

(*Fluently.*) I was just telling Clara about a

house I've seen in Lancaster Gate. A good, large, corner house, on gravel, with a splendid south aspect over the Park, and sunshine all the day.

GEORGE.

Do you want to move there?

LUCY.

Very much—if you quite approve.

GEORGE.

Why?

LUCY.

It's not healthy here. You know how bad the fogs are. They say they're always lighter across the Park. It would be so much better for the children.

GEORGE.

They're not seedy, are they?

LUCY.

No, but they flag. (*Conclusively.*) Lancaster Gate is so much more bracing.

GEORGE.

Three men in the house, I suppose, instead of two!

LUCY.

No! I think we could manage with two. I must talk to the butler about it. Besides, moving would give us a chance of selling some of this furniture. I know you don't like it.

GEORGE.

I loathe it!

CLARA.

Poor father hadn't much taste.

GEORGE.

(*Coldly.*) Is the house already taken?

LUCY.

Oh no, George, of course not. I should naturally ask your leave first.

GEORGE.

Very well. Do as you like. If it's good for the children we'd better go.

(*He drops into a chair.* LUCY, *with wifely solicitude, brings a cushion, puts it behind his head, and then stands by him affectionately while she talks.*)

LUCY.

Thank you, dear, so much! I know how un-

selfish you are—and it's for the children's sake. (*Coaxingly.*) There's another thing I want to consult you about. Isn't it time we gave up the horses and got a motor?

GEORGE.

Aren't you a little sorry to give them up? The nation is suffering from congested cities. I'm all for "back to the land." Motors are awfully useful, but they've come on the world too fast. They're spoiling the peaceful country, killing the friendly quiet of lane and village. How Morris and Ruskin would have cursed them!

LUCY.

So do I—when I'm walking. I mean, I hate all the rush and dust—of other people's. One's almost compelled to have a motor in mere self-defence, though I don't like chauffeurs, of course. They're most extortionate, full of dishonest tricks, and don't know their places.

GEORGE.

Grooms were decent lads from a country farm. I'm told the distress among them is dreadful—so many are out of employment.

LUCY.

I should keep on the coachman and have him trained. The groom can still look after the children's ponies.

GEORGE.

If we both think it would be pleasant and kind to keep on horses, why not stick to ours for the present? It gives us a chance, for once, of not doing an inconsiderate thing because it's the fashion.

LUCY.

The country roads are spoilt already, so it makes no difference. We really must have a motor. Every one has one nowadays, even Socialist Cabinet Ministers.

GEORGE.

All Cabinet Ministers are humbugs—the Socialistic ones especially!

CLARA.

Of course! Every one's more or less of a humbug but you, George. You'd be so much happier if *you* were a little bit of one now and then!

GEORGE.

(*Bitterly.*) And you think there's need to say that to me while I'm in this house! (*To* LUCY.) But if you've made up your mind, why consult me?

LUCY.

I wanted to consult you—whether you think, dear, it's best to have a Daimler or Humber?

GEORGE.

(*Moving the cushion away.*) Oh!

CLARA.

When are you going to give a dinner-party?

LUCY.

The end of next week, if George is willing. (*To* GEORGE.) Would the Friday suit?

GEORGE.

(*Vaguely.*) I don't know.

LUCY.

I mean, will you be at home?

GEORGE.

I don't know.

LUCY.

But we can't have a party without you, George. I'm sure you dislike them. I'm sorry; but it's really a duty. And you know you think so much of duty.

GEORGE.

Very well, then—the Friday.

LUCY.

Shall we ask the Stephenses?

GEORGE.

I don't care.

LUCY.

Or the Faussets?

GEORGE.

Ask any one you like.

LUCY.

(*A little pained, she moves from him and takes a seat.*) I wish you would express an opinion, George—one way or the other. After all, you're the host. It's your party as much as mine.

CLARA.

(*As she moves to the piano.*) My dear, when you give a party, let the man choose the wine and the wife choose the guests. Then every one's happy. (*She sits down and plays softly.*)

LUCY.

You seem to take so little interest in any of our affairs—it sometimes hurts my feelings, dear.

GEORGE.

(*Pulling himself together.*) I'm sorry—I'm exceedingly sorry. But I know so few of your friends.

LUCY.

But I want you to know them better. Only you don't seem to care for any of them.

GEORGE.

(*Remorsefully.*) I wish I could. But somehow I can't—I can't!

LUCY.

(*Bitterly.*) I know you despise them because they're sane, well-to-do people. You don't try to care for anything I like.

CLARA.

(*Playing.*) Aren't you rather grumpy this evening.

GEORGE.

(*Jumping up.*) I'm afraid I am.

CLARA.

(*Stopping suddenly.*) It's we who ought to be grumpy. What with the new fashions—which are simply hideous—and the price of everything

going up so, we shall have to fall back on the Simple Life, after all.

(*The* BUTLER *announces* MR. DICKINSON, *who immediately enters with an air of friendly cheerfulness. He is not in evening dress.*)

DICKINSON.

(*Shaking hands.*) How do you do? I've just come from the Elysium Club. I was passing and thought I'd look in. Pray excuse my costume. I'm glad George keeps me in countenance.

LUCY.

It's nice of you to drop in like this.

DICKINSON.

(*To* CLARA.) I don't think I've seen you, Miss Harburn, since that night George gave up his cigarette-making.

CLARA.

You mustn't chaff him about his youthful follies. We ignore the episode. He's growing wiser as he grows older.

GEORGE.

I hope so, I'm sure! With such a smart inquisitor, I know I ought to recant—or go to the rack.

DICKINSON.

You mustn't corrupt him, Miss Harburn. You mustn't make him "rat" to the Classes—away from the Masses.

GEORGE.

I never liked the distinction. I think we need (*waving his hand in a circle*) more Class-circulation.

DICKINSON.

And Capital-circulation too. There's far too much fixed capital nowadays, in spite of death-duties and taxes. (*Playfully to* CLARA.) And how does the Budget suit you?

CLARA.

It's simply bleeding us white.

DICKINSON.

I don't yet see any signs of pallor, I'm glad to say! I think it's glorious. It leaves me quite untouched. That's the best of being a pauper—you can help on these great financial achievements with entire impartiality. (*To* GEORGE.) When's the boy coming back from school?

GEORGE.

On Tuesday.

DICKINSON.

Where's he going to afterwards?

LUCY.

Eton.

GEORGE.

(*On edge.*) It's the first I've heard of it. Suppose I object?

LUCY.

It wouldn't be right not to give him every advantage. I want us both to be proud of our son.

CLARA.

Of course he's going to Eton, George! Father wished it.

GEORGE.

Indeed! Do you think that's the best training for the son of a Socialist?

CLARA.

It's the best training for Harold. We hope he'll choose Diplomacy or the Guards. It would have so gratified his grandfather.

GEORGE.

You seem to forget he's *my* son!

LUCY.

Oh no! But father left so much money to Harold, it's only right to consider his wishes.

GEORGE.

(*Firing up.*) So you think his grandfather's devilish money has bought him body and soul? Suppose I refuse to sell him?

LUCY.

(*Soothingly, calmly.*) You're very tired to-night, dear, or you wouldn't talk like that. It sounds so unnatural in a father. I pray every night that Harold may turn out a good and useful man.

DICKINSON.

(*To* GEORGE, *changing the conversation.*) You must bring him round to see me one day the end of next week.

GEORGE.

Delighted!

LUCY.

(*Gently.*) I'm afraid he won't be here.

GEORGE.

(*Sharply.*) Why not?

LUCY.

I forgot to tell you, I've promised to let him stay with a school friend—a son of Lord Malvern's.

GEORGE.

(*Holding himself in with difficulty.*) I think I might have been asked—told, before!

LUCY.

You're so busy. I always try not to bother you too much with plans. I know how they tire you. The Malverns are influential people. They can help Harold on in the future. If he chooses the Diplomatic Service, Lord Malvern is just the man to get him a nomination. (*Rising.*) I'm going to hear Millie's prayers. I shan't be long.

(*She goes out.*)

CLARA.

Then I'll leave you two gentlemen to plot our utter destruction together.

(*She also goes out.*)

(GEORGE *jumps up and marches about the room excitedly.*)

GEORGE.

(*Breaking out with passion.*) I'm frantic! I'm driven frantic here—like a wild animal caught and caged! It isn't Lucy. . . . She's as nice

as can be. It's class—it's wealth—it's social decorum—it's life itself! A kind of impalpable cage of convention which breaks my heart. Look at this house—the butler—the simple youth who let you in! He doesn't even know that indoor service and livery are degrading. The very atmosphere here kills all manhood. (*After a moment.*) Lucy and I love each other as much as ever. And yet we've hardly a thought in common. It's all the Money! I keep silent—I must. But it makes my position utterly false. My son at Eton—you heard her—the Guards or Diplomacy! And I believe in disarmament and universal peace. Ridiculous—isn't it! He'll have Money! She spoils the children. They're being ruined for life. And I can do nothing. (*He suddenly turns to* DICKINSON.) You can't fight society, Dickey—not if you've got a wife and children safe in the fold. It can't be done!

DICKINSON.

Not by example and influence? Influence is a wonderful power.

GEORGE.

I thought so once. It's impossible here. You might as well try to influence the Bank of England to open and fall down before you.

DICKINSON.

Can't you let off your steam outside?

GEORGE.

Am I not always doing it? Though I can see our people think me a hypocrite. For now *I'm* supposed to have Money. "It's all very well," they say to each other, "for him to jaw about the evils of wealth. Why, he lives in a house worth three hundred a year, with five horses and three men in livery."

DICKINSON.

I see, the plush and silk stockings rankle. I don't think I mind them myself—rather decorative. The last touch of colour from the Middle Ages.

GEORGE.

I don't care, of course, what our people say. It's because I give them cause, I'm sickened. For indirectly I am living on plunder—her father's loot. I shall have to drop taking an active part in the Movement. I see it! I do more harm than good. I shall have to pass on *The Torch* to some other hand. I never realized the immense power of Capital till I married a financier's daughter. I've fought it—I've fought it, Dicky, and it's defeating me at last!

DICKINSON.

I can see you're wriggling a bit. Take care!

GEORGE.

Doesn't a worm wriggle on the hook?

DICKINSON.

(*Soothingly.*) Come and stay with me for a few days, old chap! A change will do you good. It will give you a chance of cooling down.

GEORGE.

I should like to come. I need a rest—and time to think things over. But I daren't. I might find it too difficult to return.

DICKINSON.

(*Airily.*) Why come back at all if the life here chokes you?

GEORGE.

(*Very earnestly.*) Oh, I must—I must—for Lucy's sake and the children's! How could I leave them? Besides, if I did, I should leave my heart behind me. You know Henley's lines—

> "I am the master of my fate,
> The captain of my soul."

It's not true—at least not of me! I'm a captive here, bound by a hundred invisible threads, and smothered by pomp and circumstance.

DICKINSON.

(*With light mockery.*) Burst them, then—burst them! Ours is an age of revolt. The women

are in the vanguard there. Nothing must stand in the way of their *ego*—self-effectuation, I think they call it. It's time men followed their lead and jumped some fences. You should just see the condition of poor white men-slaves in America! You should hear the crack of the ladies' whips! That would teach you the sacred duty of timely revolt!

GEORGE.

(*Calm again.*) What nonsense you talk, Dickey! If I escaped, I should still find the great world a cage of gold. I've always done so. I suppose I was born too soon in a world too young. (*Almost cheerfully.*) But I'd like to come to you for a day or two—there!

(*He rings the bell and drops into a chair.*)

DICKINSON.

Right you are! To-night?

GEORGE.

Yes.

DICKINSON.

(*Playfully.*) Let's slip off quietly now, at once, with no last words to anybody!

GEORGE.

No, no! I must have my things packed and say goodbye to Lucy. (*With a change of voice.*)

Baxter used to declare I lacked all sense of compromise. He wouldn't say so (*looking round*) if he could see me now.

(*The* BUTLER *enters.*)

GEORGE.

Pack my bag for a couple of nights, please.

BUTLER.

(*With a tone of solemn reprehension.*) I'll tell Henry to pack it, sir.

GEORGE.

Get it packed between you.

(*The* BUTLER *goes.*)

DICKINSON.

Civilization has got us into such a hideous mess—it will have to begin at the very beginning, and do its work over again.

GEORGE.

Can we be sure it will do it better, after we've had our way, and pulled everything down for reconstruction?

DICKINSON.

It must put a better face on things and people. It seems to me, George, the domestic influence here is working—reversely!

GEORGE.

Not at all. But there's one mistake I've always made, and I think we Socialists make it. (*Emphatically.*) We don't sufficiently count the cost.

DICKINSON.

Why, that's our salvation! Nothing's ever done if you count the cost. I'll tell you where we may suffer after we've finished the job—life may not be quite so amusing!

GEORGE.

(*Caustically.*) It will doubtless still give plenty of opportunities for the ironic smile! (*Rising.*) Come down to my room. You can smoke while I say good-night to Lucy.

(*They go out.*)

GEORGE'S VOICE.

(*On the stairs.*) I'll be up in a moment.

DICKINSON'S VOICE.

Good-night, Mrs. Tremayne!

LUCY'S VOICE.

Good-night.

(*She comes in and stands restlessly near the fire. After a few seconds* GEORGE *joins her.*)

LUCY.

(*Catching her breath with apprehension.*) Henry's in your dressing-room packing your bag!

GEORGE.

I'm going to Dickinson's for a day or two.

LUCY.

(*Terrified.*) You're going to leave us—you'll never come back!

GEORGE.

(*Soothingly.*) Oh yes, I shall, dear—don't be alarmed!

LUCY.

Why are you going?

GEORGE.

I want a little time to myself to think things over. Will you really miss me?

LUCY.

(*Passionately.*) Oh, George, it's unkind to say that! You're all in all to me!

GEORGE.

Sometimes I seem to be only a cipher here.

LUCY.

You know it's your own doing if you are! I want you to feel yourself master. Everything's

yours that's mine—if you'd only believe it, and hold the reins. It would make me much happier if you'd take over my banking account—or share it.

GEORGE.

(*Rather sadly.*) Ah, Lucy, you treat me too well. I feel like a speck of grit that's got into the well-oiled machine of society.

LUCY.

I don't understand! I'm afraid you're not happy, dear. I would do anything I could to please you—only tell me what! Would it make you happier if we tried to live in a simpler way and only kept one man indoors instead of two?

GEORGE.

No, not particularly.

LUCY.

If you think it's more democratic we'll live in a flat instead of a house. And I'll give up all idea of a motor and stick to the horses. I know you make sacrifices for me. I want to make them for you.

GEORGE.

(*Touched.*) Don't, dear, don't! It's like your sweet self to propose it, but it would be worse that useless. I'm very exacting—I want so much! You would never understand!

LUCY.

(*Alarmed.*) Not back to a little shop, George! I couldn't bear that again!

GEORGE.

No, dear! There are some follies one does outgrow. The leap was too sudden—too big! I deserved a fall.

LUCY.

If you'll tell me anything you would like changed, I'll try to arrange it.

GEORGE.

(*Recklessly.*) Everything!

LUCY.

But, George, you can't change everything in the world—at once!

GEORGE.

I'm beginning to find that out. (*With sudden decision.*) There are two things I wish if I stay on here—and I must insist on! I wish to have Harold with us in the holidays. The visit must be cancelled!

LUCY.

He'll be very disappointed. But I can take him to Cromer instead—he needs sea air.

GEORGE.

(*Presenting his ultimatum.*) And I wish to live in the country—not Lancaster Gate!

LUCY.

(*Accepting it with delight.*) I'm so glad! I never dared to suggest it. The children will simply love it. We'll look out for a nice large place with plenty of land and shooting.

GEORGE.

Shooting!

LUCY.

Harold will want to hunt and shoot.

GEORGE.

Will he? I hope not!

LUCY.

Of course he will, George! We should encourage him to go in for sport. Every one knows it's the best thing for health and character.

GEORGE.

(*With a flash of scorching irony.*) So at last I shall be a landlord—a game preserving landlord! A landlord—and I used to talk about taxing them out of existence!

LUCY.

We shall be county people.

(*He feels that the loved hands of wife and children are closing the golden doors of the prison house on him.*)

GEORGE.

(*With the resignation of despair.*) Oh, Lucy, Lucy—you're like the Bourbons who never forgot, and never learnt, anything!

LUCY.

I know you think me stupid. But at any rate, George, I've got the common sense. Pity me, if I can't live up to your ideals. But love me —love me all the same!

GEORGE.

Always, always——

LUCY.

(*Very sweetly.*) You won't go to-night, dear, will you?

GEORGE.

You would like me to stay?

LUCY.

(*Coaxing.*) Please—please—George! Please!

(*He knows the door is shut for ever.*)

GEORGE.

Yes, dear; I'll stay!

(*She looks at the clock and rings the bell.*)

After all, what's the good of going? I can meditate on repentance here, as well as at Dickinson's.

LUCY.

(*Taken a little aback.*) Repent—of what?

GEORGE.

(*In the saddest voice.*) I hardly know. Perhaps that the little speck of grit ever got itself into the well-oiled machine. Never mind! The machine needn't creak or clog. The speck will be soon ground to powder.

(*The* FOOTMAN *enters.*)

LUCY.

(*Composedly.*) We're ready for prayers.

(*The* FOOTMAN *places the family Bible on a small table.*)

(LUCY *seats herself deliberately and begins to find the place.*)

GEORGE.

Prayers?

LUCY.

(*Reproachfully.*) Oh, George, you've forgotten it's Sunday!

GEORGE.

(*Hastily.*) I'll run down and say good-night to Dickey!

LUCY.

(*With conclusive calmness.*) He can very well wait till prayers are over. I'm afraid he wouldn't care to join us?

GEORGE.

No, I'm afraid he wouldn't!

(*The* FOOTMAN *is arranging six chairs in a row near the door.*)

(GEORGE *drops into a chair that stands near him—a small one.*)

GEORGE.

(*Wearily.*) I'm tired of struggling—I'm tired of everything!

LUCY.

(*Looking up sympathetically.*) I know you're tired to-night, dear! That looks a very uncomfortable chair. Do take another.

GEORGE.

It's all right. Please don't bother.

LUCY.

(*With all a wife's loving triumph.*) I mean to make you so snug and happy at home. I'm going to spoil you in future.

GEORGE.

(*With a very watery smile.*) Ah, Lucy! If you knew how little I deserve it!

(*The door is opened by the* BUTLER.)

Sometimes I fancy that after all . . .

LUCY.

(*Finger on lip.*) Hush! the servants!

END OF THE PLAY.

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